

THIS WEEK'S **NASH** FEATURING THE ACM NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

16
EXTRA
PAGES
INSIDE!

COUNTRY WEEKLY

THE INSIDE STORIES ON COUNTRY MUSIC'S HOTTEST STARS
MARCH 16, 2015

**LITTLE
BIG TOWN'S**
**Kimberly
Schlapman's**
down-home
cookbook

**JIM ED
BROWN**
opens
up about
cancer
battle

PLUS!



On the
Road with
RAE LYNN

LUKE BRYAN'S LAST STAND

The country
superstar
says good-
bye to his
spring break
concert
series

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THE SONGS, VIDEOS AND BITS OF COUNTRY CULTURE
WE JUST CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF RIGHT NOW!

THE HIT LIST

Island in the Sun

► It's road trip time, and we've got the perfect destination. Pack your bags and head to South Padre Island, Texas, on March 17 for some spring break fun with **RANDY ROGERS BAND** at Clayton's Beach Bar. RRB knows there are two certainties in life: death and Texas. Avoid the former, enjoy the latter on March 17.



Where There's a Will

◀ **WILL HOGE** threw a nice, intimate party in Nashville to give invited guests a preview of his forthcoming album, *Small Town Dreams*. Will played several tunes from the album, including "Middle of America" and "Til I Do It Again," and regaled the attendees with humorous and insightful stories about the song's origins. The album hits on April 7 and, based on what we've heard so far, it's one you'll want to add to your collection.

Rainey Days Are Fun Days

► *Country Weekly* staffers got a glimpse of an exciting new talent when singer/songwriter/actress **RAINEY QUALLEY** stopped by to perform some of her songs, including "Me & Johnny Cash." As the daughter of actress **ANDIE MACDOWELL**, Rainey has performing in her DNA, but her spectacular, powerful voice is all her own.



Fiesta, Forever

▼ In support of their new album, *Mono*, and their Mono Mundo Tour, **THE MAVERICKS** invited industry guests out to a special rehearsal event on a frigid Nashville night. Thankfully, between the free-flowing margaritas and The Mavericks' perfectly tight grooves, there was enough heat generated that evening to last the winter.



Radio Romance

▼ Longtime country fans lament the fact that mainstream radio has virtually ignored the artists who made the format popular in the



95.5

NASH ICON RADIO.

While tooling around Nashville, we've been treated to, among others, Gene Watson's "Fourteen Carat Mind," Joe Diffie's "John Deere Green" and "Chains" by Patty Loveless, all mixed in with current hits. Never thought we'd hear those songs again, especially on contemporary radio.

first place. But you'll change your tune when you listen to

THE JUKEBOX

Essential songs from the artists featured in this issue!

Luke Bryan

"I See You"

"Play It Again"

"Roller Coaster"

Ralph Stanley

"Wayfaring Stranger"

"I'll Answer the Call"

Jim Ed Brown

"Pop a Top"

"Bottle, Bottle"

Cole Swindell

"Ain't Worth the Whiskey"

Thomas Rhett

"It Goes Like This"

Sam Hunt

"Take Your Time"

Lady Antebellum

"Freestyle"

RaeLynn

"Boyfriend"

Craig Wayne Boyd

"My Baby's Got a Smile on Her Face"

Stoney LaRue

"Aviator"

SaraBeth

"You Rock My Rodeo"

Chase Bryant

"Take It On Back"

Larkin Poe

"Jailbreak"

rdio Look for this *Country Weekly* playlist on **rdio**!

COVER STORY

44

Luke Bryan

It's been an "amazing," to use Luke's favorite term, year for the country superstar, capped off with awards and headlining tours. And he only aims to get better. This year, he'll be playing additional stadiums and hosting his final spring break party in Florida, but check out what else he has in store.

24 | **Craig Wayne Boyd**

Life has been a whirlwind for *The Voice* champion since his big win.

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The trio outlines tour plans and upcoming activities at a Nashville breakfast/press event.

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Get a glimpse of the young star's road life.

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The online concert series brings the artists to your home.

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After a bout with cancer, the Opry legend bounces back with a new album.

62 | **Ralph Stanley**

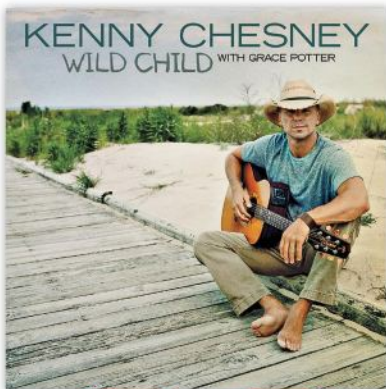
The good doctor enlists his grandson and close friends for a spirited duets album.

LIVE: COURTESY SCHMIDT RELATIONS; RAE LYNN BY DREW GURIAN
ON COVER: LUIS B. JIM WRIGHT; RAE LYNN BY DREW GURIAN



27 NASH

It's a tough choice for the ACM New Artist of the Year between three talented guys: Sam Hunt, Thomas Rhett and Cole Swindell. Since fans have a say in determining the winner, we'll help you make your choice with our special preview. Plus, find out what's next for Brett Eldredge after his successful and award-winning 2014.



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Stoney LaRue.

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[LETTERS]



Dear Readers:

Say it ain't so! **LUKE BRYAN** is ending his run of Panama City Beach spring break concerts after seven years, and we are certainly gonna miss him. But fear not, he's not really going anywhere, he's just closing a chapter. We will still get to watch him shake his moneymaker onstage and enjoy more great music from him. However, saying farewell to his spring break venture marks the end of an era. We sat down with

Luke to talk to him about his last hurrah and to find

out why he's saying good-bye. So check out our cover story on page 44, and don't miss Luke's final spring break chapter.

For this issue, we also spent some time on the road with **RAE LYNN**. She was on her first tour, and it happened to be with her good friend **MIRANDA LAMBERT**. CW had fun spending time with RaeLynn, and she really gave us an inside look at a day in her life. Don't miss the story on page 52.

In this week's *NASH*, we bring you three of the hottest male newcomers in country music. **COLE SWINDELL**, **THOMAS RHETT** and **SAM HUNT** have all been chosen by you, the fans, as the nominees for ACM New Artist of the Year. We take a look at this triple threat and see how they stack up. We also catch up with **BRETT ELDRIDGE** about his new album, we hit the studio with new artist **SARABETH**, we continue our *NASH* Music Madness battle of the stars and more.



See you next week!

LISA KONICKI, Editor in Chief

Tell Us What YOU Think!

MAIL: Letters, *Country Weekly*,
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Please include your name, address and daytime phone number with all correspondence. *Country Weekly* assumes no responsibility for returning unsolicited material, including, but not limited to, photographs, artwork, manuscripts and letters. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

SWEET AS PIE

Thank you for putting Loretta Lynn's cherry pie recipe in the Feb. 23 issue [*Get Cookin'*]. So appreciate seeing this amazing special lady in your fun magazine! Still making country music, still selling out shows and still wowing crowds for over 50 years! What a legend she is!

— **DEB SUGG**
Midland, Mich.

JOE, JOE, JOE DIFFIE

I loved the article featuring Aaron Tippin [*"Working Man," March 2*]. You mentioned he is doing the Roots and Boots Tour. I wish you would have included Joe Diffie as being part of that tour. Joe is in my opinion the most underrated artist in country music. He is an amazing talent with a huge vocal range. My family has taken road trips to see the tour featuring Joe Diffie, Sammy Kershaw and Aaron Tippin. People, that is a show you shouldn't miss!

— **ROBERTA STARRETT**
Indiana

KISS THIS

I am very excited to see the Aaron Tippin article in *Country Weekly* celebrating his 25th year in country music. His new CD, 25, has such great old favorites along with several new songs. Doesn't an event like this deserve a cover on *Country Weekly*? It's hard to believe it has been 25 years, and that is a milestone for such a great country singer. I have been an Aaron Tippin fan for *all* those 25 years, and I know there are others out there just like me.

— **KIM WOODYARD**
Pearisburg, Va.

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COUNTRY WEEKLY

THE INSIDE STORIES ON COUNTRY MUSIC'S HOTTEST STARS



[THE BIG PICTURE]

BLUSHER

They may have competed against each other as coaches on *The Voice*, but that didn't stop Blake Shelton and R&B star Usher from teaming up at a show for the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas in February.



PHOTO BY JORDAN TAYLOR WRIGHT/DRUSE PR

the mix

ALL YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE STARS OF COUNTRY—AND THEN SOME!

For the latest music news,
go to **COUNTRYWEEKLY.COM**

Saddle Up!

GEORGE STRAIT may have hung up his touring hat, but he'll still be making an appearance at an event he helped start more than 30 years ago: the George Strait Team Roping Classic. This year's competition at the San Antonio Rose Palace in Boerne, Texas, takes place March 13 and 14, and features top roping teams from around the country. It's the largest team roping event in the U.S., and last year's Classic drew nearly 700 teams vying for arena-sized cash winnings and prizes. George will not be performing, but you can catch a good glimpse of him as he hosts and greets fans on horseback.



CROW HOPPIN'
Old Crow Medicine Show took the stage at 57th annual Grammy Awards to perform "8 Dogs 8 Banjos."



CALIFORNIA DREAMING
Taylor Swift, Kerry Washington and Betty White join in on the fun of "The Californians," a skit on *Saturday Night Live's* 40th anniversary special.

BRANDY SURGE

Two-time nominee **BRANDY CLARK** may have gone home from the Grammys empty-handed, but her pockets are probably filling up now. After the live telecast—where Brandy performed her song “Hold My Hand” with **DWIGHT YOAKAM**—she registered a 598 percent jump in traffic on Rdio, which dwarfed the surge received by other Grammy candidates like Sam Smith (152 percent) and St. Vincent (265 percent).



COUNTRY COMES TO QUEENSLAND

It isn't the first year for CMC Rocks in Queensland, but it could be the biggest year for the event that is billed as Australia's Biggest International Country & Roots Festival. **KACEY MUSGRAVES** is the most recent artist to sign on for the three-day (and three-stage) concert, and she joins some of America's hottest country stars, like **LADY ANTEBELLUM**, **BIG & RICH**, **CHRIS YOUNG**, **LEE BRICE**, **MADDIE & TAE**, **CHARLIE WORSHAM** and **CHASE BRYANT**, along with a variety of local performers. Held at Ipswich's Willowbank Raceway, the fun starts March 13.



LUCKY IN LOVE

St. Patrick's Day, as you all know, is **March 17**. Typically we like to do a playlist of songs about luck or something green (thanks, Joe Diefie!), but we've kind of been there and done that. This year, we decided to cast off the shackles of polite behavior and give you a list of country songs about getting lucky, in the spirit of Eric Church's new single, “Like a Wrecking Ball.” Warning: playing these songs greatly increases your risk of slow-dancing and removing clothing. For your sake (and theirs), make sure the children are away for the night.

“Nothin’ On but the Radio”
Gary Allan

**“Must Be Doin’
Somethin’ Right”**
Billy Currington

**“I May Hate Myself
in the Morning”**
Lee Ann Womack

“I Melt”
Rascal Flatts

“Let’s Make Love”
Tim McGraw
and Faith Hill

“Gettin’ You Home”
Chris Young

“Come Over”
Kenny Chesney

“Alone With You”
Jake Owen

“Raining on Sunday”
Keith Urban

“Need You Now”
Lady Antebellum

“Your Man”
Josh Turner

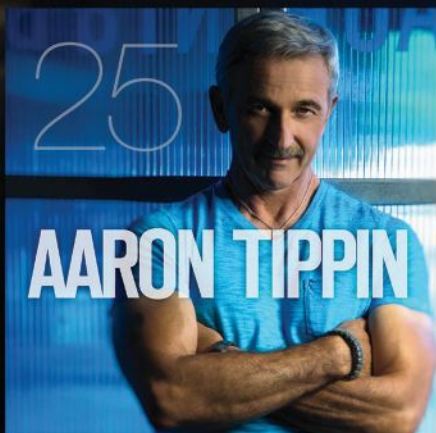


RYMAN RENOVATIONS

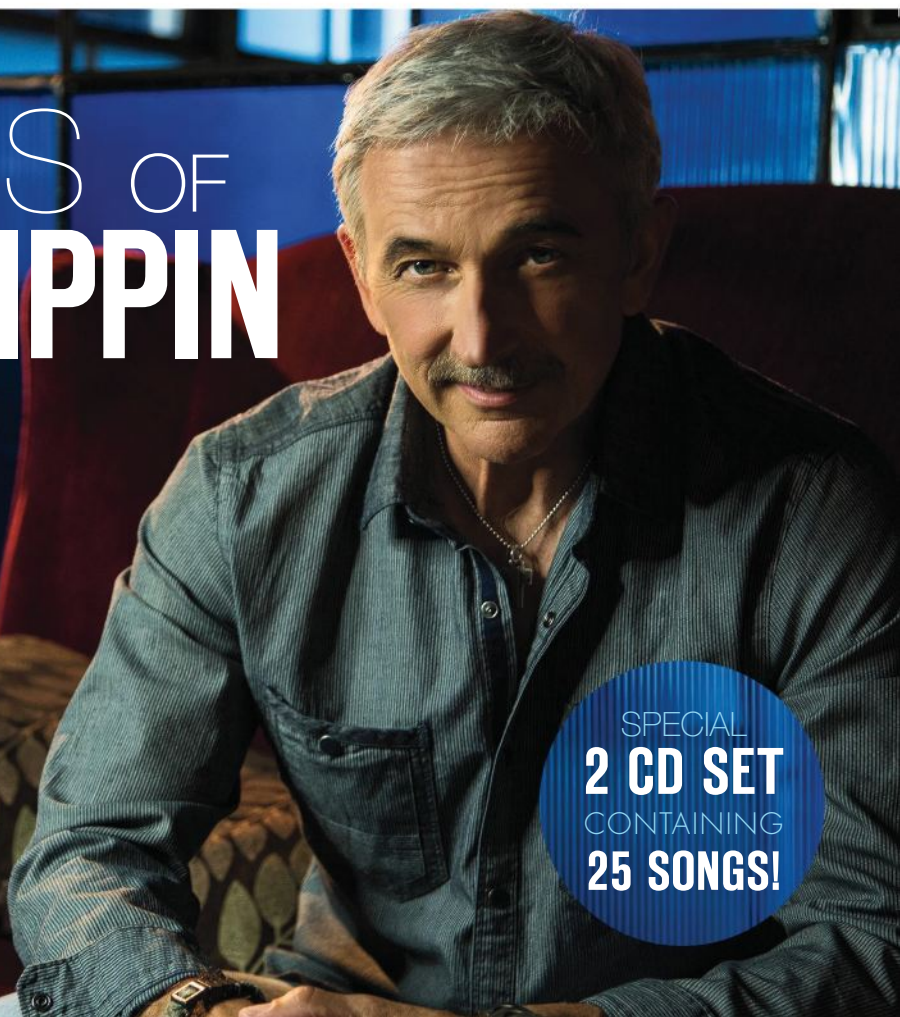
Nashville's historic **RYMAN AUDITORIUM** is currently undergoing a \$14 million renovation. Construction, which began in October 2014, is slated to be completed by June 2015 and will include an expanded lobby, an expanded gift shop, a cafe that extends to the outdoors and an interactive multimedia tour. The auditorium itself, which has continued business as usual, is a national historic landmark and will remain unscathed throughout the construction.



25 YEARS OF AARON TIPPIN



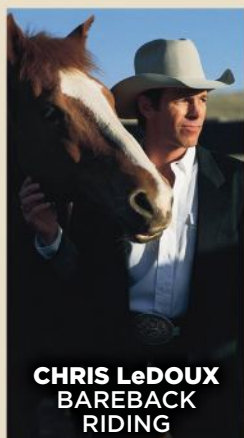
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COWBOY UP

If you're a lucky resident of Houston, you're smack dab in the middle of **THE HOUSTON LIVESTOCK SHOW AND RODEO**, which is the largest entertainment and livestock event in the world. The worlds of country music and cowboying have collided so much, it's no surprise that a lot of country artists have at least practiced or competed in rodeo-type events. Some won't surprise you, but others will have you hollering "Yee haw!"



CHRIS LeDOUX
BAREBACK
RIDING



REBA McENTIRE
BARREL
RACING



GEORGE STRAIT
TEAM
ROPING



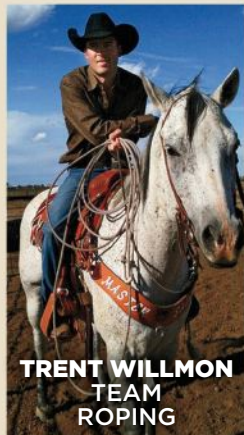
MOE BANDY
BRONC AND
BULL RIDING



CODY JOHNSON
BULL
RIDING



RYAN BINGHAM
BULL
RIDING



TRENT WILLMON
TEAM
ROPING



JON PARDI
TEAM
ROPING



CASEY DONAHEW
TEAM
ROPING



SHAKE IT OUT

Did you guys sort of feel the earth rumbling beneath your feet when the Grammy Awards took place on Feb. 8?

That was perhaps because **TAYLOR SWIFT** was seen shaking hands and posing for photos with rapper **KANYE WEST**, who infamously interrupted her Female Video of the Year acceptance speech at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards to express his opinion that **BEYONCÉ** should have taken the prize. And more than a fleeting encounter at the Grammy Awards, Taylor and Kanye were recently spotted dining together in New York and are reportedly collaborating on new music. Kanye is of course still interrupting speeches to proclaim his support for Beyoncé, but this time at the Grammys it was Album of the Year winner **BECK** who was upstaged.



When Kanye isn't the center of attention, he makes himself the center.



BEVERLY HILLS PAWN



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Brantley Gilbert addresses the crowd. (Below left) BMI execs Bradley Collins (left) and Jody Williams present Brantley with five certificates of recognition.



(From left) Co-writers Brett James, Brantley and Justin Weaver

PARDON ME

On **March 14, 1972**, then-California governor Ronald Reagan pardoned **MERLE HAGGARD** for a 1958 robbery attempt that resulted in a 15-year prison sentence, of which Merle served two and a half years. In honor of the 43rd anniversary of Merle's gubernatorial pardon, we came up with eight country songs whose condemned protagonists probably wished a governor had "executed" a pardon for them.



"Billy Austin" and "Over Yonder (Jonathan's Song)"
Steve Earle

"25 Minutes to Go"
Johnny Cash



"Long Black Veil"
Lefty Frizzell

"Sonora's Death Row"
Robert Earl Keen



"Sing Me Back Home"
Merle Haggard

"Women's Prison"
Loretta Lynn



"Snakes Crawl at Night"
Charley Pride

PARTIES

NEVER TOO LATE TO CELEBRATE

BRANTLEY GILBERT NO. 1 PARTY | POUR HOUSE, NASHVILLE

When an artist's calendar is filled with tours, recording, writing, fairs, festivals, awards shows and life in general, it makes it difficult to squeeze in a celebration for a No. 1 single, but friends and family recently gathered to raise a glass for **BRANTLEY GILBERT**'s 2014 chart-topper "Bottoms Up." The success marked the first No. 1 for co-writer Justin Weaver, whom ASCAP's LeAnn Phelan pointed out took 67 publisher meetings in the first nine months he was in Nashville. The celebration was a little more familiar for co-writers Brantley, who has a handful of No. 1s, and Brett James, who has a whopping 21 No. 1s under his belt. Brantley addressed the packed Pour House, thanking everyone not only for supporting the song, but also for supporting him during his three years of sobriety. He joked that before he stopped drinking he consumed enough for five years, and said, "I've got my 'I can write drinking songs' card." In addition to reaching the top of the charts, "Bottoms Up" has also been certified double platinum, marking sales of more than 2 million units.

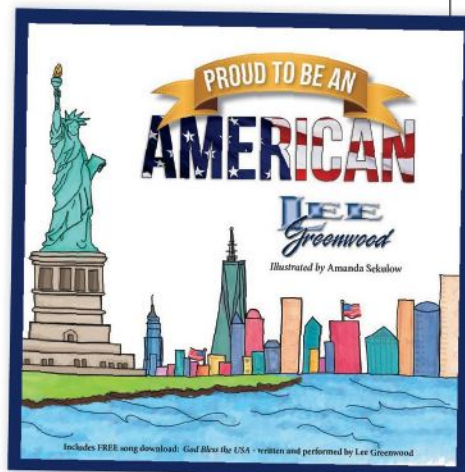
Book It!

If your bookshelf is looking a little depleted these days, you can help fill it up with a couple of new books by **LEE GREENWOOD** and Little Big Town's **KIMBERLY SCHLAPMAN**.

Kimberly, known to her fans as an expert cook, offers recipes, culinary tips and anecdotes

from the road in her cookbook, ***Oh Gussie! Cooking and Visiting in Kimberly's Southern Kitchen***. Kimberly wrote the book with award-winning author Martha Foose. Some of the recipes will be taken from Kimberly's Great American Country cooking show, ***Kimberly's Simply Southern***. The cookbook hits stores and online retailers April 14.

Lee's book, ***Proud to Be an American***, is inspired by his iconic song, "God Bless the USA." *Proud to Be an American* aims to instill a patriotic spirit in young people and tells the story of how his upbringing led to his lifelong patriotism. The book also features poignant



lyrics from "God Bless the USA," which Lee wrote in the early 1980s, and a free download of the song. You'll find it in stores and at online retailers beginning May 25.

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WORTH THE WAIT

WAY BACK IN THE MySpace days, up-and-coming songwriters would use the social media site to hear music, network and set up appointments to collaborate with others trying to get a foothold in the business. So when Adam Sanders came across a guy named Josh Martin, he did that very thing. After a couple of successful writing sessions, Josh felt he should bring Adam in on another write with his friend Cole Swindell.

As Josh predicted, the three meshed together well with their personalities and their style of writing. They would frequently get together at Josh's apartment, drink beer and see what song ideas they could come up with. It wasn't long into their friendship that Cole was picked up by Sony/ATV Publishing, giving Josh and Adam hope to someday be in the same position.

Josh, who was working as a security guard at Belmont University at the time, had limited windows of when he was able to write. So to accommodate his late-night hours, Cole, Adam and Josh met for an evening write at Cole's new publishing home to see what they could knock out before he went in to work. "It was the first time for me and Josh to be in an actual publishing office," Adam remembers. "We were both young writers and excited to be in the room."



As they pulled out their guitars and phones to flip through ideas, Josh already knew of one title in particular—"Ain't Worth the Whiskey"—that he had been saving to share specifically with Cole. "I felt it was the best title I had," says Josh, who didn't quite get the feedback he was hoping to get from his friends that night.

"When he threw it out there, I started thinking," Cole recalls. "I guess he thought I didn't like it, so he went on and was reading stuff. By the third title he threw out, I was

like, 'Why are you even talking? Hold on . . . we've gotta write the "you ain't worth the whiskey" song!' Adam and I were both in a place where we were ready to write a good breakup song, so it was perfect timing!"

All three of them agreed on writing "Ain't Worth the Whiskey," but they didn't want the tune to be a traditional-sounding breakup song. "Yes, this girl broke our heart, but we're not going to let it deter us from having a good time," Josh explains. "We wanted it to be a drinking, fun break-

COLEBY CID PRESENTS/ALIVE COVERAGE/JOSH COURTESY JOSH MARTIN; ADAM COURTESY RED LIGHT MGMT



“AIN’T WORTH THE WHISKEY”

← Performed by
Cole Swindell

→ Written by
Cole Swindell,
Adam Sanders,
Josh Martin



WHISKEY PROOF



Adam Sanders is quickly following in the footsteps of his pal Cole. Not only is he basking in the success of being a writer on “Ain’t Worth the Whiskey,” but he also co-penned Dustin Lynch’s new hit, “Hell of a Night.” Songwriting aside, Adam is also close to inking his own record deal as an artist with a new single coming to satellite radio in the next few months.

up song where we’re going to drink to this and that and do this and that, but *she’s* not worth the whiskey”

“It didn’t take us long to figure out the angle that we wanted to approach it,” Adam says. “Cole knew where it needed to go.”

In less than three hours, “Ain’t Worth the Whiskey” was complete, worktape and all, leaving Cole, Adam and Josh excited about what the future could hold. “We knew that night that it was a hit song,” Josh says. “We were pumped up. We

thought this can’t fail!”

The song went on hold for several artists, including Montgomery Gentry and Thompson Square, but was never recorded as the writers had hoped. “We had huge dreams for the song,” notes Adam. “A bunch of people liked it, but for whatever reason, it just kept getting passed on. We all agreed at that time, whichever one of us got a record deal first would cut that song.”

“Little did we know that Cole was going to get a record deal and blow

the hell up!” Josh adds, laughing. “That’s what he’s done. I’m truly blessed for God’s timing.”

“Ain’t Worth the Whiskey” became Cole’s third single from his self-titled debut album, and quickly became the fastest-rising single of his career.

“It just goes to show, everything happens just as it’s supposed to,” Cole says. “You just never know. All you can do is try to record the best songs, and I’m just thankful this one was around for me to record.”

— ALANNA CONAWAY

[QUESTIONS]



Chase Bryant

Hot newcomer Chase Bryant has a Top 10 hit with “Take It On Back” and he’s getting ready to hit the road with Tim McGraw this summer. We caught up with the Texas native to discuss important career advice and his Craigslist browsing habits.

— ALANNA CONAWAY

When was the last time you were mistaken for another celebrity?

I’ve been mistaken for Justin Bieber a couple of times. I was walking through an airport and I got mistaken for him. Then I was like, “No, I’m not him.” Then somebody was like, “Well, you kind of look like that guy who sings ‘Take It On Back!’” I said, “Well, that’s because that’s me. I’m not Justin Bieber!”

What is a song you wish you had written?

“Please Come to Boston.”

What is the last piece of advice someone has given you that you actually followed?

My tour manager, right before I walk onstage. He always says, “Don’t suck.” Honestly, that’s a big one, because people say that, and you kind of listen to it and go, “Ha ha ha, that’s really funny!” But what if I walked onstage and I was just half of who I was that night? People would remember that and never go see me again. When he says that, it’s like, “Thanks, man. I appreciate that. I’ll try not to.” [Laughs]

If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?

Probably London or Paris or something like that. I’m a wine guy and I’m a foodie, so that would be kind of cool to go over there and see some of that. I always see it in the movies. I’m from a small town in Texas. I never really got outside of the country, except for maybe Mexico once or twice. I’d love to get over there.

If you could open a show for anybody, who would it be?

It would be a tossup—either Keith Urban or Bryan Adams.

What is your best stress reliever?

Fishing.

What is your favorite celebrity perk?

Sometimes it’s free food at restaurants.

What is something that you love to spend money on?

Guitars.

How do you spend your downtime on the road?

On my bus on Craigslist or eBay looking for guitars or good deals. I spend a lot of time on the road doing that.

What do you have under your bed?

Suitcases. That’s the easiest place to store them.

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Get Your Shine On

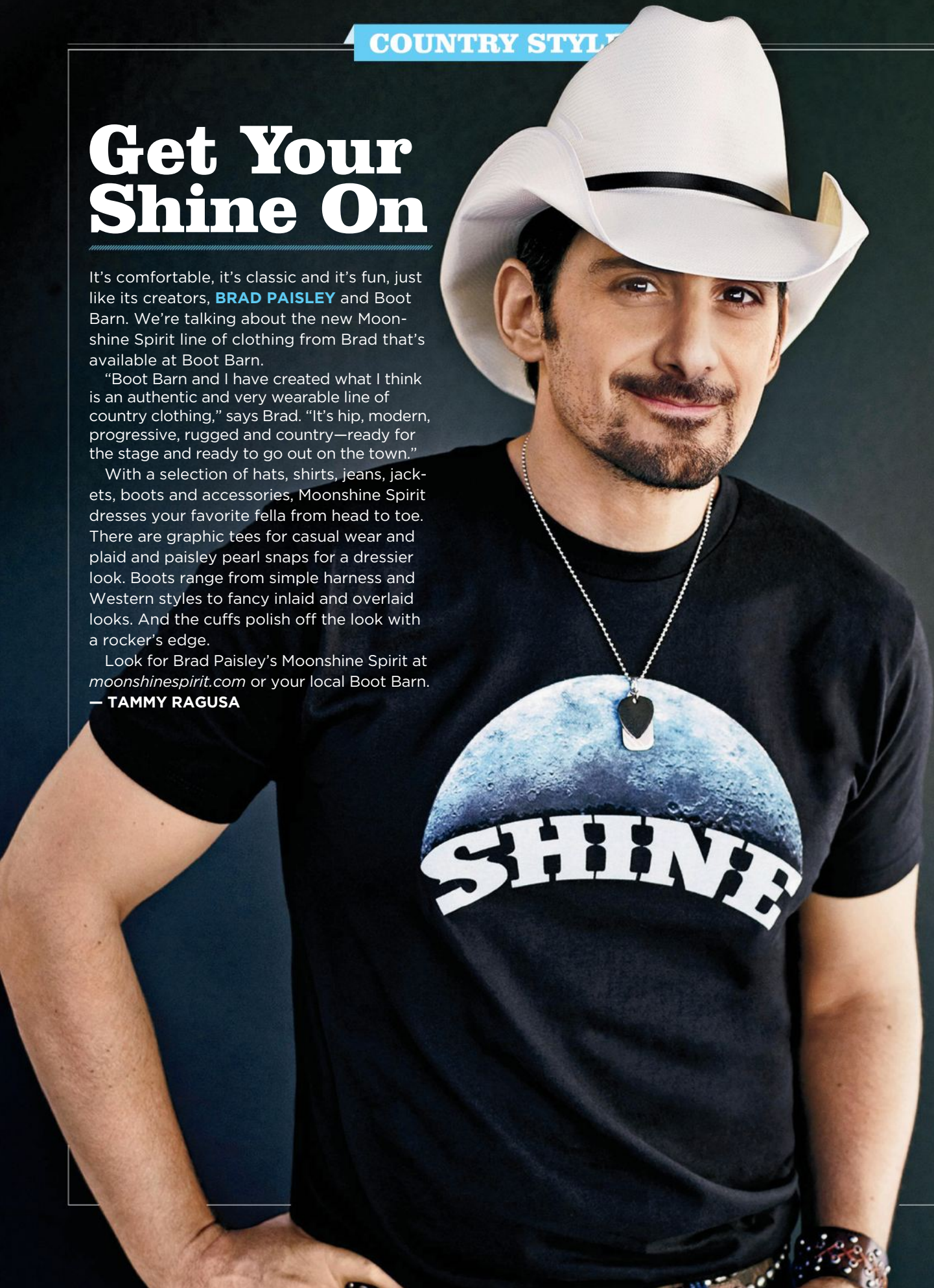
It's comfortable, it's classic and it's fun, just like its creators, **BRAD PAISLEY** and Boot Barn. We're talking about the new Moonshine Spirit line of clothing from Brad that's available at Boot Barn.

"Boot Barn and I have created what I think is an authentic and very wearable line of country clothing," says Brad. "It's hip, modern, progressive, rugged and country—ready for the stage and ready to go out on the town."

With a selection of hats, shirts, jeans, jackets, boots and accessories, Moonshine Spirit dresses your favorite fella from head to toe. There are graphic tees for casual wear and plaid and paisley pearl snaps for a dressier look. Boots range from simple harness and Western styles to fancy inlaid and overlaid looks. And the cuffs polish off the look with a rocker's edge.

Look for Brad Paisley's Moonshine Spirit at moonshinespirit.com or your local Boot Barn.

— TAMMY RAGUSA





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AS FREQUENT TRAVELERS ARE KEENLY aware, the Austin music scene might only be rivaled by its burgeoning food scene. You'll never run out of great places to dine in the Lone Star State capital, and you can find everything from Texas traditions like brisket and barbecue to upscale gourmet fare.

The popular spot Roaring Fork, with two locations in Austin, combines a touch of the Old West with contemporary cuisine. The entrees, which include beef, chicken, pork and fish dishes, are prepared using a wood-fired rotisserie, open-flame grill or wood-fired oven. And you'll want to try their lineup of Roaring Sides, like Mexican street corn or the kicking green chile mac and cheese, spotlighted right here.

If you're planning on hitting Austin for SXSW 2015, March 13–22, check out Roaring Fork.

— BOB PAXMAN

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Green Chile Mac & Cheese

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

1 pound elbow macaroni
1 small onion, diced
2 medium organic poblanos, diced
2 medium organic red bell peppers, diced
1 tsp. kosher salt

2 tsp. fresh ground black pepper
1 cup local dairy heavy cream
2 cups pepper jack cheese
¼ cup of panko breadcrumbs

COOK macaroni in plenty of salted water until tender. **DRAIN** and set aside.

Sauté onions and peppers in oil for 4 to 5 minutes.

SEASON with salt and pepper.

ADD cream and reduce for five minutes.

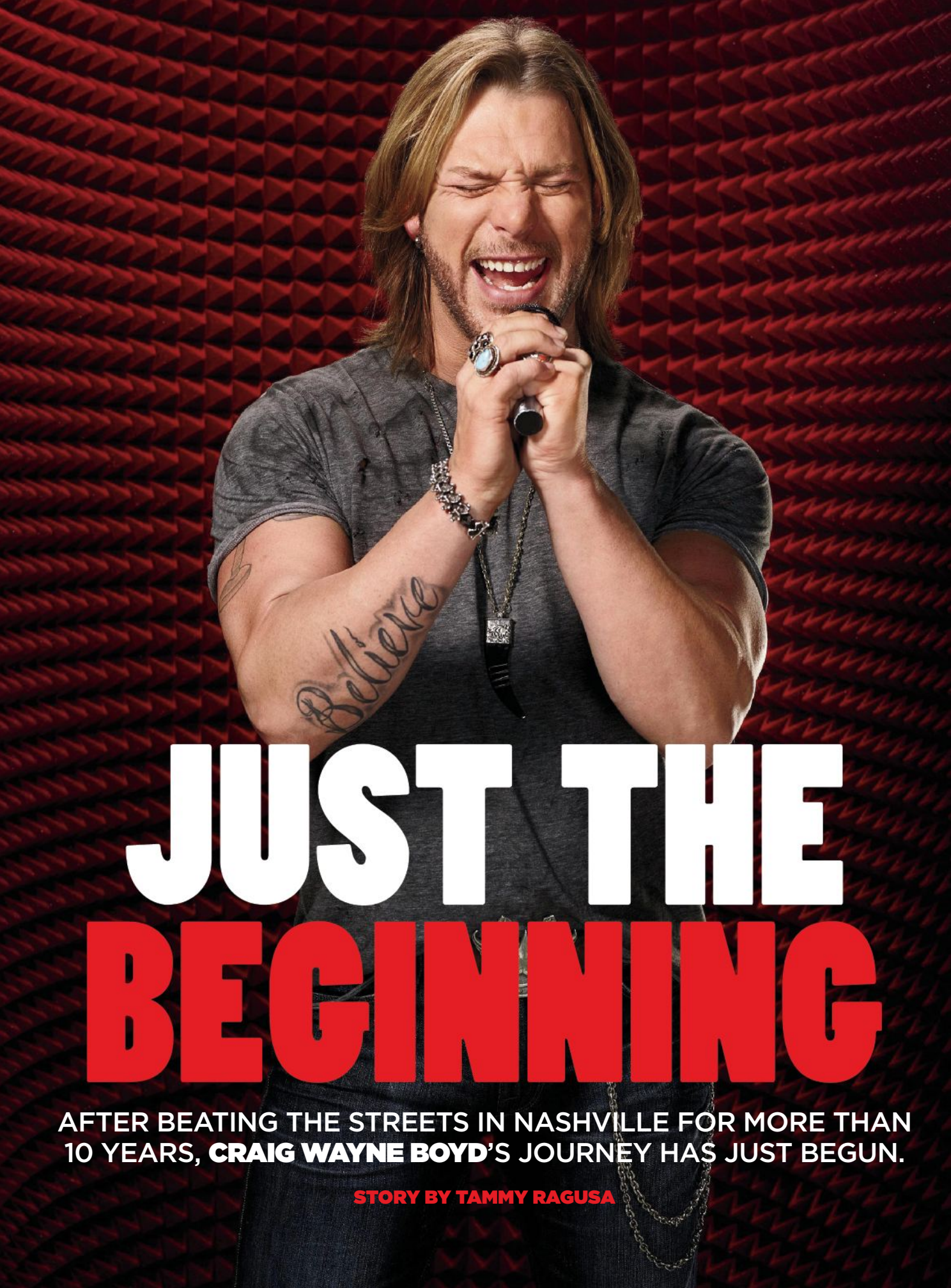
ADD macaroni and turn off the heat.

FOLD in the cheese (setting aside some for topping) and check seasoning by taste.

PLACE mac and cheese in a baking dish. **TOP** with additional shredded pepper jack cheese and some panko breadcrumbs.

BAKE in a 350° oven for 20 to 30 minutes or until golden brown and bubbly.





JUST THE BEGINNING

AFTER BEATING THE STREETS IN NASHVILLE FOR MORE THAN 10 YEARS, **CRAIG WAYNE BOYD'S** JOURNEY HAS JUST BEGUN.

STORY BY TAMMY RAGUSA



When that *Voice* trophy becomes yours, what else are you going to do besides give it a kiss?

WHEN CRAIG WAYNE BOYD

moved to Nashville in 2004, one song in particular soundtracked his trip: Rascal Flatts' "I'm Movin' On."

"That's probably one of my favorite songs," Craig recalls of that transformational time in his life. "I literally played that nonstop."

It seems appropriate, then, that Craig landed the supporting role for Rascal Flatts' residency at The Joint in Las Vegas' Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, which is nearing an end as of this writing. But things are really just starting to take off for the Season 7 winner of *The Voice*. Following Vegas, Craig will hit the road for fall and festival season, stopping along the way to visit with fans and his friends at country radio to promote his single, "My Baby's Got a Smile on Her Face."

As you might expect, Craig still hasn't caught his breath from the cyclonic activity following his victory as a member of Team Blake. During his visit to the *NASH/Country*



Weekly offices, he looks cool, serious and polished in a blazer, jeans and boots—every inch the budding country music superstar. But from the first question asked, Craig Wayne's excitement can't be contained.

That question: In one word, how has life been since *The Voice*? Craig inhales deeply and pauses for a second while he processes the past few months. "Whirlwind," he says after releasing his own gust of breath. He smiles warmly and doesn't resist

the urge to surpass our one-word limit. "There have been so many wow moments," he continues. "Moments that are bigger than anything I could have ever imagined." When Craig pauses again, it becomes obvious that those "wow moments" have had a deeper impact than he expected. "I'm going to end up tearing up," he admits. "Anything that I could have ever dreamed or hoped for, it's superseded that."

In addition to that sweet win for Team Blake, "anything" includes making his debut on the Grand Ole Opry, becoming the best-selling artist in the history of *The Voice* with more than 100,000 copies sold of "My Baby's Got a Smile on Her Face," and having that same single debut at No. 1 on *Billboard's* Hot Country Songs chart. The latter puts him in pretty impressive company, considering the only other artist who has done it is Garth Brooks.

Kinda makes the dues Craig paid kicking around Nashville for 11 years

"I had to look inside and let go of the good, bad, ugly and indifferent... and that was when everything started happening."



Post-Voice, Craig had a huge opportunity to warm up the crowds at Rascal Flatts' Las Vegas residency.

CRAIG WAYNE BOYD CONT. worth it. He thinks so, anyway. "I feel like there's no regrets for anything that I've done because I think that everything leading up to now has prepared me for what is going on. And if it had happened 11 years ago, then I wouldn't have the knowledge that I have now," he says. That includes the newfound ability to handle not knowing what's on his schedule from one day to the next. "There was a term they used on the show," Craig remembers with a laugh. "Nino, one of the producers, would say, 'Today's fast and loose, fast and loose.' Basically, he was saying, 'Roll with the flow, and whatever comes, just handle it then.' And that's how life is now and that's what I'm doing."

Even having his name paired with Garth Brooks for a history-making career milestone needs to be taken in the appropriate stride, but Craig admits he was pretty excited to hear the news and called his manager to

ask if it was a joke. They celebrated, of course, but tried not to let it mess with their expectations. "It is what it is and it's cool to be able to say that and overwhelming to reach goals like that," he says. "Goals that I didn't even set are being met right now. But you enjoy it for the moment and then move on."

With so many great things happening to Craig now, it's hard to imagine that he once almost walked away from music for good. "Before I had the opportunity to go on the show, I was trying to figure out how to still do music but move back home, because I felt like I was just spinning my wheels," he recalls. "I was working so hard and I was pushing something, but it just wouldn't move. I had to look inside and let go of the good, bad, ugly and indifferent, and when I did that was when everything started happening." He moved ahead full bore, believing, in his words, "Don't hold back."

Craig reveals he's keeping the philosophy he learned on *The Voice* of being "free and loose" for his hour-long slot with Rascal Flatts and his own summer tour schedule. "I call it 'controlled spontaneity,'" he says, laughing. "Just about every night will be different because I fly by the seat of my pants." Lucky fans who catch him on the road this year will get a sneak peek of what's in store on his first major-label album, as he promises to perform new material.

It's an exciting prospect to see where this veteran will take his career and how he will change. But no matter what, there will still be plenty of that guy who made the drive to Nashville more than a decade ago. You can see it on his right ring finger, which sports a beautifully unique silver ring with an unpolished stone. "I got it because I thought it was me," he says. "A little rough around the edges."

And, hopefully, he'll be keeping it that way. **CW**



PHOTO BY JOHN RUSSELL/CMA

**16
Extra
Pages!**

**BRETT
ELDREDGE**
IS GAINING
STEAM WITH
UPCOMING
ALBUM

**STUDIO
615 WITH
NEW
COUNTRY
VOCALIST
SARABETH**

**MUSIC
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VOTE FOR
YOUR
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STAR

TRIPLE THREAT

**COLE SWINDELL, THOMAS RHETT
AND SAM HUNT VIE FOR THE
ACM NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR AWARD**

BECOMING BRETT



WITH THREE HIT SINGLES UNDER HIS BELT, **BRETT ELDREDGE** GETS READY FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF HIS CAREER.

SOMETIMES PATIENCE CAN PAY off in a big way. Just ask Brett Eldredge. While he didn't exactly break through with his 2010 debut single, "Raymond," he never lost focus on the bigger picture and where he envisioned his career could take him. All it took was the right song and the right time, both of which arrived in 2013 when "Don't Ya" dominated the airwaves.

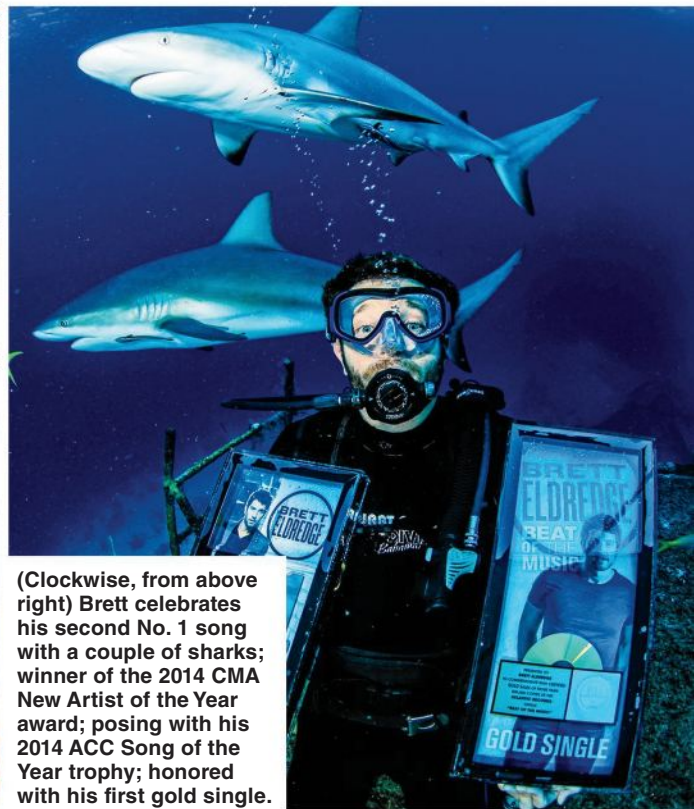
"The last two years have been an incredible climb for my career," Brett tells **NASH**. "'Don't Ya' really gave me that kick in the pants that I needed in my career, and it just took off!"

The song became one of the most played songs in 2013 and was certified gold for sales exceeding 500,000 units. So as Brett entered 2014, the pressure was on to once again come out swinging. With his follow-up single, "Beat of the Music," and debut album, *Bring You Back*, Brett was able to hit it out of the park.

"We put out a song that I wrote about a girl on the beach in the islands on the momentum of 'Don't Ya,' and my fans grabbed ahold of it and shouted out to radio that they wanted to hear it," says Brett. "Radio stuck with me throughout it, and the next thing I know it was the most-played song in 2014. That was an awesome feeling."

He finished out that year by taking home his first CMA award, for New Artist of the Year, and also an American Country Countdown award commemorating the success of "Beat of the Music"—his second consecutive No. 1.

Presently, Brett is on track for making it three in a row with "Mean to Me." Right out of the chute, the tune became his fastest-rising single to date, but more importantly, it allowed fans and country radio to connect the dots



(Clockwise, from above right) Brett celebrates his second No. 1 song with a couple of sharks; winner of the 2014 CMA New Artist of the Year award; posing with his 2014 ACC Song of the Year trophy; honored with his first gold single.



between voice and artist.

"It's the best feeling in the world, knowing that people can turn on the radio and they know that's a Brett Eldredge song because 'I know his voice,'" Brett says as a smile spreads across his face. "When you release your first song, it's like, this is a new voice. Now, people know my voice and they are calling to request that new Brett Eldredge song. It's like the momentum and that climb that I've been looking for my whole career, and I've wondered if it's ever going to come. I always believed that I still had a shot, so I continued to wake up and go to that writing session and go to that radio station and meet that new fan."

With "Mean to Me" on a trajectory to the top of the charts, Brett is looking to tighten up work on his sophomore album and find his next single to release. Experiencing the studio a second time around has the singer/songwriter and co-producer—who is working once again with Ross Copperman to create the album—feeling more confident in capturing the sound and style he has been perfecting the past few years.

"I feel way more comfortable in the studio than I ever have, and that in itself is an amazing feeling," explains Brett, who turns 29 at the end of March. "Musically and personally, it has been really cool to be in the studio recording this one. The whole album has

been a growth for me, and I can't wait for people to hear some of the stuff we are working on!"

A first single from the project has yet to be named, but Brett promises that the upcoming album will expand on what he accomplished with *Bring You Back*.

"This new music is a lot of fun," he adds. "There are some deep songs like there were on the first album, and there are some really, really fun ones—even more fun than I had on the first album. It's going to be a lot of fun. I'm so ready for this next phase with the new music!"

But until then, patience will be a virtue for the fans.

—ALANNA CONAWAY

NASH | *STUDIO 615*

LIVE PERFORMANCES
FROM **NASH** CAMPUS

SaraBeth leans into one of her tunes, backed by Christen Cole and Glen Mitchell (not pictured).

SARABETH

WHEN

Feb. 12

SONGS PERFORMED

"You Rock My Rodeo"

"Nowhere With You"

NASH FAVORITE

"Sick of It"

WHAT'S NEW

In 2014, SaraBeth released an EP, *Obsessive*, and now she's out with an entirely new self-titled collection.

SHOWTIME

Pure, crystalline tones showcase SaraBeth's classical training, but make no mistake, this girl is from Texas—cowboys, rodeos, country music and all—and that swagger is obvious when she performs.

FEEDBACK

"I think I did the classical stuff because that's really what was offered. I was in the Texas All-State Choir and all that awesome fun stuff, and you win all these awards and accolades and stuff, but it's so technical that [I enjoy] getting to do something where you just have fun and if the spirit moves you to do some extra tag line at the end of the song, nobody cares. There aren't as many rules. I don't feel confined."

THE SINGLE FILE

"We wrote ['Sick of It'] at my apartment and we wrote it really fast, but Gwen Sebastian just started playing the riff of the song and I was thinking, 'It just sounds like someone is really sick of this, like they're really mad.' So, we started humming and singing and really we ended up writing that in about an hour. We wrote that song so fast but it was because it was just flowing and we were all really enjoying ourselves as we wrote."



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FOR THE SHOW

**THE ACADEMY OF COUNTRY MUSIC'S
NEW ARTIST OF THE YEAR AWARD IS
DOWN TO A TRIO OF GEORGIA BOYS.**

AND THEN THERE were three. From a list of eight talented artists, the nominees for the Academy of Country Music award for New Artist of the Year have been whittled down to a top trio of male stars—Sam Hunt, Thomas Rhett and Cole Swindell, who all hail from the state of Georgia. Now, it's up to you, the fans, to help determine the winner.

Actually, the fans have had their say in the matter for the past seven years, combined with the ACM membership vote. But this year saw a first-time partnership between the ACM and CMT, where voters could make their selections either through voteacm.com or voteacm.cmt.com. Final voting begins April 8 and runs right through April 19, the night of the televised Academy of Country Music

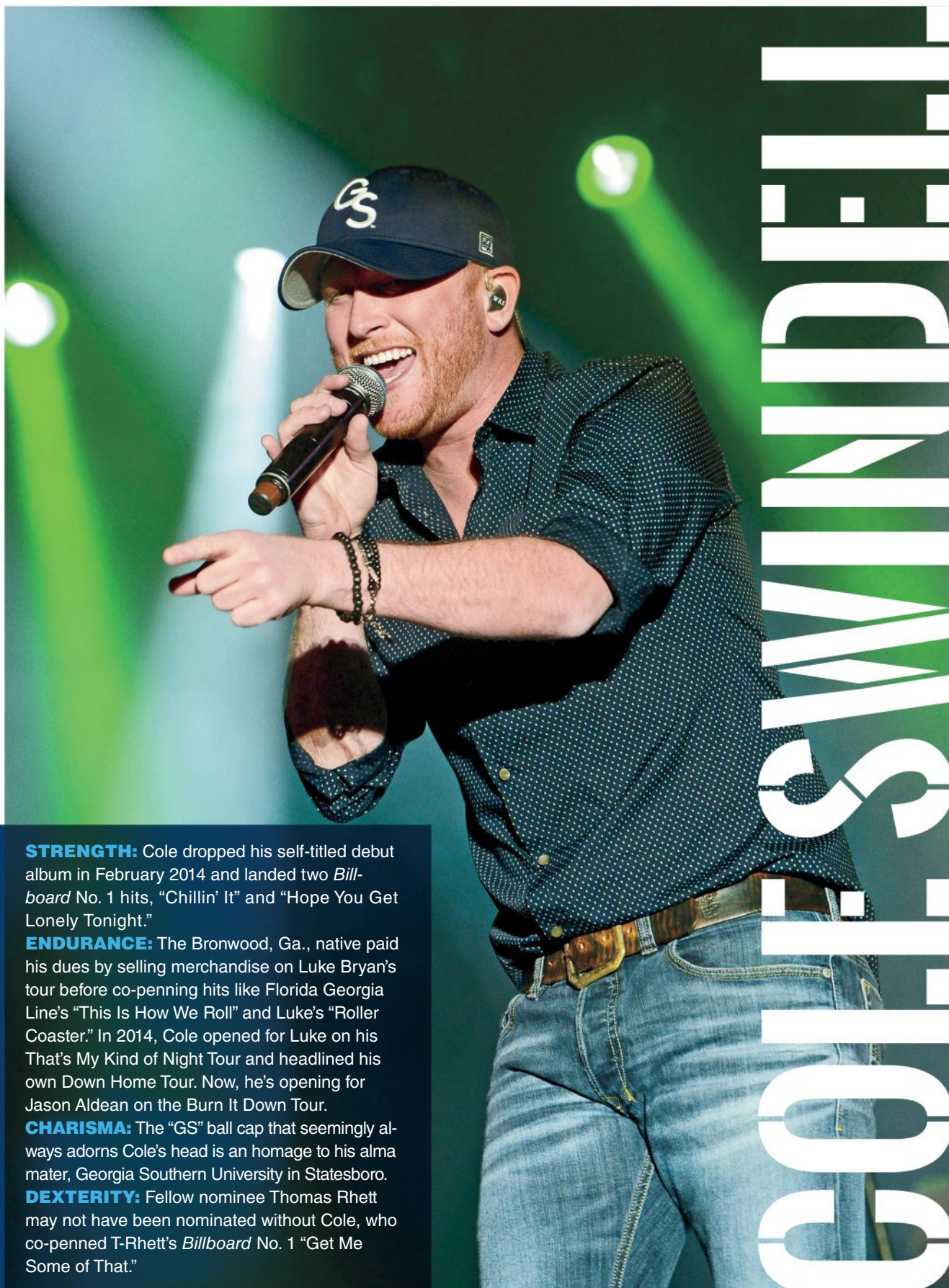
Awards show, at voteacm.com only. The winner will be chosen from fan votes and the ACM member ballots.

The eventual titleholder—whether Sam, Thomas or Cole—will become part of a group that's enjoyed an interesting history. From the first awards ceremony, held in 1966, up to 2008 (save for the years 2003 and 2004), new artist awards were separated into Top New Male Vocalist and Top New Female Vocalist categories, determined strictly by the industry membership. In 1989, the category of Top New Vocal Duo or Group was added. In 2003 and 2004, Male, Female and Vocal Duo or Group were combined into one honor, New Artist of the Year, won by Dierks Bentley and Gretchen Wilson, respectively. In 2005, the award returned to separate categories.

Since 2008, fans have been involved

in the voting process for the combined Top New Artist of the Year, which can include male and female artists as well as groups. That inaugural honor was won by Julianne Hough, these days much more renowned for her dancing skills than for country chart busters. The following year proved a barometer of good things to come when Luke Bryan took home the award. Starting with the 2010 awards, the honor was renamed again, shortened to simply New Artist of the Year. And the past four honorees (ACM awards are given for the previous calendar year) were The Band Perry, Scotty McCreery, Florida Georgia Line and Justin Moore. All have gone on to successful and soaring heights, wouldn't you say?

Now, here's a look at this year's three nominees. Check out our profiles—and make sure to cast your vote!

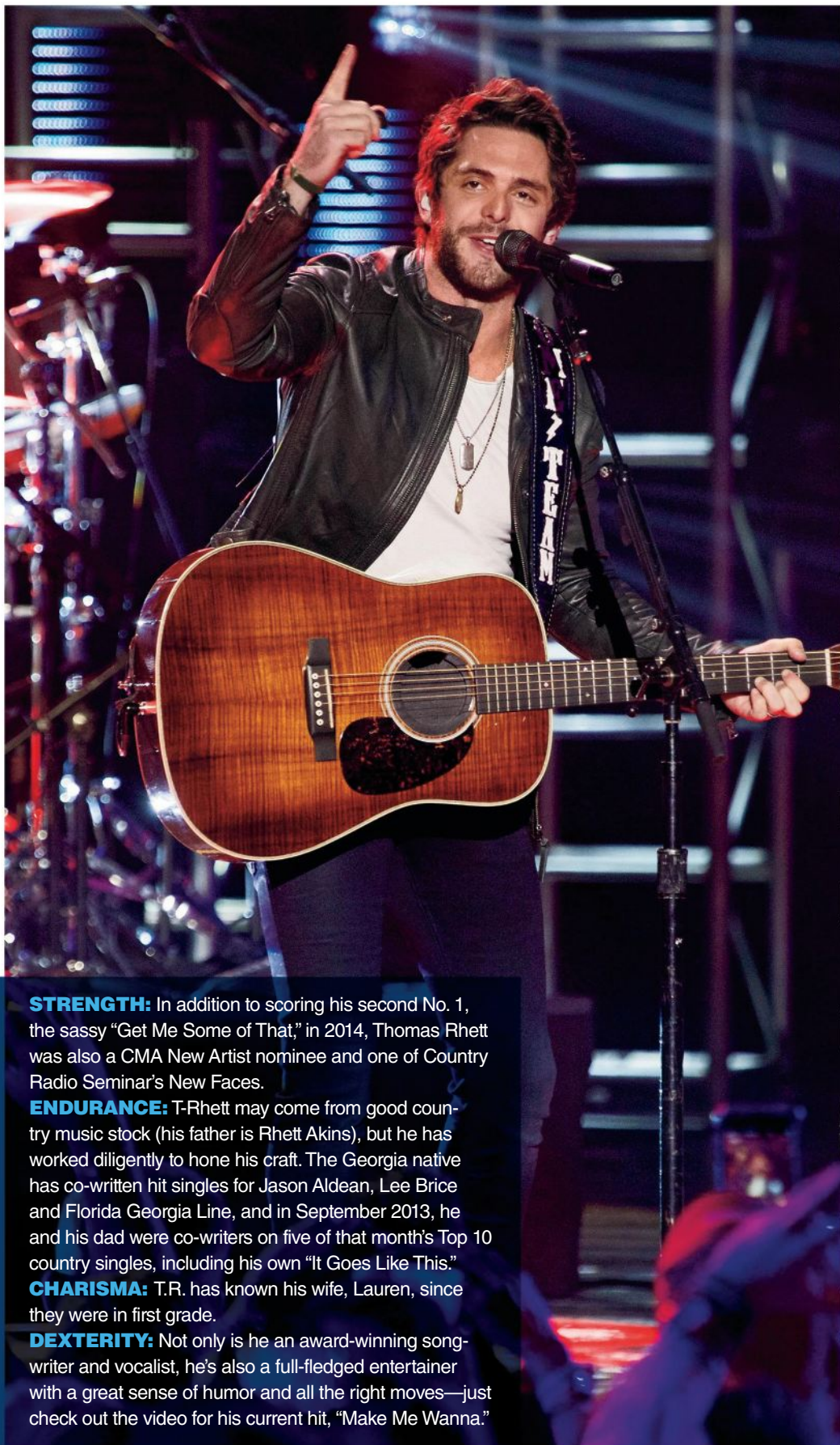


STRENGTH: Cole dropped his self-titled debut album in February 2014 and landed two *Billboard* No. 1 hits, “Chillin’ It” and “Hope You Get Lonely Tonight.”

ENDURANCE: The Bronwood, Ga., native paid his dues by selling merchandise on Luke Bryan’s tour before co-penning hits like Florida Georgia Line’s “This Is How We Roll” and Luke’s “Roller Coaster.” In 2014, Cole opened for Luke on his That’s My Kind of Night Tour and headlined his own Down Home Tour. Now, he’s opening for Jason Aldean on the Burn It Down Tour.

CHARISMA: The “GS” ball cap that seemingly always adorns Cole’s head is an homage to his alma mater, Georgia Southern University in Statesboro.

DEXTERITY: Fellow nominee Thomas Rhett may not have been nominated without Cole, who co-penned T-Rhett’s *Billboard* No. 1 “Get Me Some of That.”



THOMAS RHETT

STRENGTH: In addition to scoring his second No. 1, the sassy “Get Me Some of That,” in 2014, Thomas Rhett was also a CMA New Artist nominee and one of Country Radio Seminar’s New Faces.

ENDURANCE: T-Rhett may come from good country music stock (his father is Rhett Akins), but he has worked diligently to hone his craft. The Georgia native has co-written hit singles for Jason Aldean, Lee Brice and Florida Georgia Line, and in September 2013, he and his dad were co-writers on five of that month’s Top 10 country singles, including his own “It Goes Like This.”

CHARISMA: T.R. has known his wife, Lauren, since they were in first grade.

DEXTERITY: Not only is he an award-winning songwriter and vocalist, he’s also a full-fledged entertainer with a great sense of humor and all the right moves—just check out the video for his current hit, “Make Me Wanna.”

THOMAS BY TED PARKER/INVISION/AP/CORBIS; SAM BY SPLASH/CORBIS

INTERVIEWS



STRENGTH: Sam's single "Leave the Night On" rocketed to No. 1, going on to earn platinum sales numbers, and his debut album, *Montevallo*, landed on numerous Best of 2014 lists (including ours).

ENDURANCE: Sam, a native of Cedartown, Ga., initially made a name for himself as a songwriter, co-penning hits like "Come Over" for Kenny Chesney before his turn as a solo artist. He toured with Kip Moore before launching his own sold-out Lipstick Graffiti Tour in January 2015. In spring, he goes back to a supporting role with Lady Antebellum's Wheels Up 2015 Tour. His second single, "Take Your Time," recently made the trip to No. 1 on *Billboard's* Hot Country Songs chart.

CHARISMA: A college football quarterback for both Middle Tennessee State University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Sam was briefly affiliated with the Kansas City Chiefs but it didn't pan out. Luckily for us, he packed his bags for Nashville instead.

DEXTERITY: *Montevallo* was a bold challenge to the status quo in terms of its futuristic production, but it also proved there was a way to incorporate R&B and hip-hop elements into a narrative country songwriting style.

NASH MUSIC MADNESS!

THE SUPER 16



64%



36%



34%



66%



35%



65%



41%



59%

THE GREAT 8



1. MIRANDA LAMBERT (TEXAS)

- Grammy Best Country Album
- CMA Female Vocalist of the Year
- CMA Album of the Year

After cruising to opening-round victories, Miranda and Dierks are poised for their first real test of the tournament. Look for Miranda to come out with her fast-paced offense by relying on her animalistic instincts, but don't be surprised if Dierks tries to channel his alter ego, '90s country rocker Douglas "Big Rhythm Doug" Douglasson, to discombobulate Miranda's attack.



4. DIERKS BENTLEY (ARIZONA)

- CMA Video of the Year
- Grammy Best Country Album nom.
- *Billboard* No. 1 album

THE WEST



3. CARRIE UNDERWOOD (OKLAHOMA)

- Grammy Best Country Solo Performance
- ACM Special Achievement Award
- *Billboard* No. 1 album

This promises to be an old-fashioned Oklahoma shootout between the West's two most famous sharpshooters. No one game-plans like coach Blake (*The Voice*'s four-time champion) and he's back in top form on Season 8 of the singing competition, but Carrie's new Calia apparel line may be just the performance advantage she needs to take down the Zen master of country music.



2. BLAKE SHELTON (OKLAHOMA)

- CMA Male Vocalist of the Year
- CMA Entertainer of the Year nomination
- ACM Entertainer of the Year nomination

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FGL BY ALBERTO RODRIGUEZ/NICKELODEON; BLAKE, DIERKS, M&T, JASON, SAM BY JOHN RUSSELL/CMA; GARTH BY VINCENT MUZIK/CORBIS; MIRANDA BY JASON MERRITT/ACM; KEITH BY ERIC HENDERSON/CORBIS; KACEY BY ALBERT FERREIRA/ABC; LUKE BY IMAGE SPACE INC/CORBIS; STURGILL BY TERRY WYATT/SHORE FIRE MEDIA; KENNY BY TAMMIE ARROYO/AFI; ERIC BY BYRON PURVIS/CORBIS; TIM BY DEBBY WONG/CORBIS

In honor of college basketball's craziest month, *NASH* created a bracket with 16 of the hottest solo/duo acts in country music. We seeded them based on the strength of their current "season" and pitted them against each other in a winner-takes-all format that features East vs. West. For the next three weeks, visit CountryWeekly.com and VOTE on who you think should win the head-to-head battles until we crown our champ.

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THE FINALS
AVAILABLE IN
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ISSUE

THE FAB 4
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**WILL
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THE GREAT 8

1. LUKE BRYAN (GEORGIA)

- CMA Entertainer of the Year
- ACC Male Vocalist of the Year
- AMA Favorite Country Male Artist

Luke showed why he's the tournament's juggernaut with an opening-round blowout over Sturgill Simpson, while Eric squeaked by wily veteran Tim McGraw. In this mano a mano matchup, Eric will likely get an adrenaline boost from the birth of his newborn son, but he'll need to find his range from the outside, or this Outsider is going to be out of luck against spring break's favorite son.

4. ERIC CHURCH (NORTH CAROLINA)

- Grammy Best Country Album nominee
- Grammy Best Country Song nominee
- AMA Favorite Country Album



THE EAST

6. KENNY CHESNEY (TENNESSEE)

- ACC Groundbreaker Award
- *Billboard* No. 1 album
- RIAA platinum song

Sam had the opening round's biggest upset as he sank Florida Georgia Line at the buzzer. He'll look to continue his Cinderella story against Kenny, who pulled off an upset of his own over Jason Aldean. No one packs an arena like Kenny, so you can be sure he'll have the crowd's support, but Sam proved his killer crossover appeal should not be underestimated again.

7. SAM HUNT (GEORGIA)

- *Billboard* No. 1 album
- *Billboard* No. 1 song
- *Billboard* 200 (all genre) No. 3 album



THE SUPER 16



74%



26%



45%



55%



60%



40%



51%



49%



America's Morning Show hosts Terri Clark and Blair make a pair of nice bookends for Lady Antebellum.

Flight Plan

Lady Antebellum soars in 2015 with guests Hunter Hayes and Sam Hunt.

Lady Antebellum has come a long way since I was first introduced to them in 2007. Back then, they were just three kids looking for a record deal and I was a radio guy standing in a towel in my Nashville hotel room. It's a long story, and I'll spare you the details right now.

Since that fateful day, Lady Antebellum has seen platinum sales success, plus multiple Grammys, CMAs and ACMs—the whole bit. This year, they are preparing to embark on what I believe will be one of the most exciting tours of the summer: the Wheels Up 2015 Tour. Charles, Hillary and Dave have put together

a superb lineup with special guests Hunter Hayes and Sam Hunt.

I've been a fan of Hunter's since I heard his first single, "Storm Warning," in 2011, and his 2012 smash hit, "Wanted," solidified his star power even more. I've had the opportunity to watch Hunter perform live, and let me tell you, he knows how to get an arena on its feet!

Then there's Sam Hunt, the new guy in town. A good ol' Georgia boy by birth, he has to be one of the most innovative artists I've heard in a long time. Sam's music is an eclectic mix of country infused with urban cadences that will make you ask yourself, "How did he just do that?" His debut album, *Montevallo*, has not left my Rdio playlist since it came out last fall.

The three will hit the runway on Wheels Up's North American leg on May 1 in Lubbock, Texas, with more than 40 dates to follow. The icing on the cake for this trek, according to Hillary, is playing Bridgestone Arena in Nashville. "I grew up here and playing that arena will be a huge moment for us all," she says. "Not to mention it'll be Charles' birthday."

Even with five albums to Lady A's

credit, Charles says there's always pressure to keep going. "You're only as good as your last hit," he admits. "And Kenny Chesney taught us early on that it's important to always stay on the radio." "Bartender," the lead single from their latest album, *747*, did just that, hitting No. 1 and reaching the platinum sales mark.

The band's latest single is "Free-style," which Hillary describes as an "energy mover." Charles, meanwhile, admits that it's a bit of a different sound, but that one of their goals is to always "be a little different, yet still stay true to Lady A."

That's a pretty solid philosophy for a music career and it shouldn't be long before the Wheels Up Tour hits cruising altitude. For more on Lady Antebellum, check out the feature on page 50 of this issue and to hear our whole interview, just check out our website at americasmorningshow.com.



Blair Garner, a member of the National Radio Hall of Fame, is host of the **NASH-FM** nationally syndicated **America's Morning Show**.



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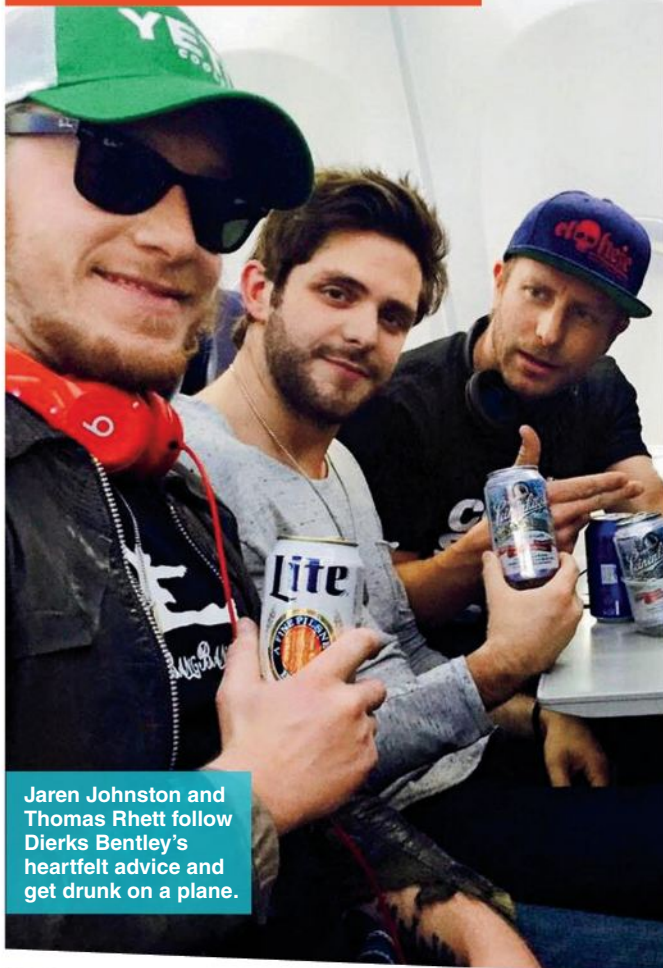
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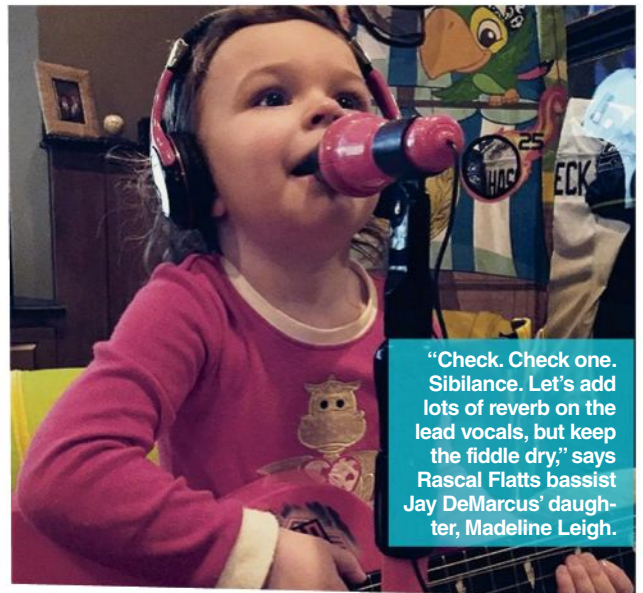
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NASH | *ON the SCENE*

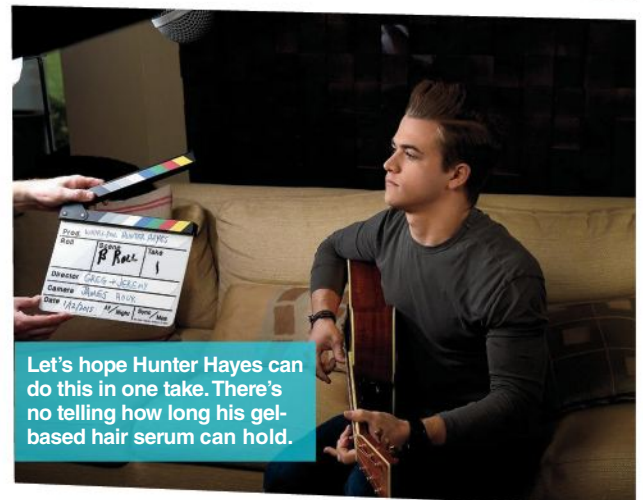
OUT AND ABOUT WITH YOUR FAVORITE STARS!



Jaren Johnston and Thomas Rhett follow Dierks Bentley's heartfelt advice and get drunk on a plane.



"Check. Check one. Sibillane. Let's add lots of reverb on the lead vocals, but keep the fiddle dry," says Rascal Flatts bassist Jay DeMarcus' daughter, Madeline Leigh.



Let's hope Hunter Hayes can do this in one take. There's no telling how long his gel-based hair serum can hold.



If riding around in Waylon Jennings' '99 Caddy with Jewel can't make Jamey Johnson smile, nothing will.



Rascal Flatts' Joe Don Rooney is holding the first Martin acoustic guitar ever built, proving that people in 1833 were much smaller than they are today.

Some Days Look Better Upside Down

SPINNING RING



*Center band spins to reveal
an engraved message*



*Eeyore turns every day into a
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Even with his seemingly mopey disposition, Eeyore can still brighten the gloomiest of days with his surprisingly endearing perspective. His observation that "some days look better upside down" is a reminder that it's not the situation that matters, but how you look at it. Now you can celebrate the fun of turning around a bad day with our "Some Days Look Better Upside Down" Spinning Ring.

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NASH | SOUND BITES

WHAT YOUR FAVORITE STARS ARE SAYING ON NASH-FM

It's such a fun song to perform live. That's one thing we are seeing in our live show and the few times we've been able to perform it on TV. It's a good energy mover in the room.

HILLARY SCOTT

of Lady Antebellum on their single "Freestyle"

I was really passionate about music. I was pretty naïve and adventurous at the time, and I thought going to Nashville would be something that I could do and at least figure out and pursue the idea of the music thing.

SAM HUNT

on moving to Nashville

I wish it was my ankle or something that wouldn't keep me from playing guitar, but, yeah, I'll be back at it soon, though.

FRANKIE BALLARD

on injuring his arm

When you walk in there, they don't see you; they only hear you, and I think that's important because that's what music's about, right? It's about what you feel, not what you see.

CRAIG WAYNE BOYD

about the TV Show *The Voice*

It's a cool song. It's been fun to watch it grow from when we play it before it gets on the radio and then all of sudden it adds that success. It's fun to watch that evolution.

ERIC CHURCH

on the success of "Talladega"

I think if you don't have hope, you don't have anything. I think what America stands for and what we can spread all across the world and what we should represent is hope.

TIM MCGRAW

on what the sentence "I love my country" means to him

AMERICA'S MORNING SHOW
WITH **BLAIR GARNER**

KICKIN' IT
WITH **KIX BROOKS**

**MUSIC CITY
HOT SPOTS**

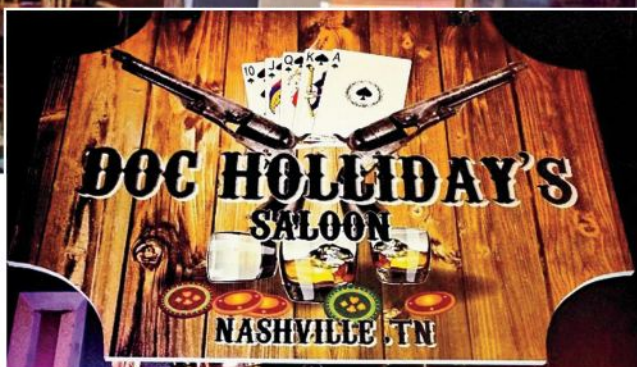
DOC HOLLIDAY'S SALOON

It may not be where the Bloody Mary originated, but Doc Holliday's Saloon, located in Nashville's bustling honky-tonk district, is where it's been perfected. Cozier than its neighbors, Doc's has all of the great brick-and-mortar, honeyed-oak architecture that other historic downtown establishments have, but it has its own kind of attitude, and you'll get a glimpse of that before you even step inside. The sandwich board placard on the sidewalk is worth a giggle, with quotes from historic figures like Mark Twain and W.C. Fields. Or maybe it will taunt you with an invitation to try the 20-ounce Bloody Mary. Oh yeah, back to that. Doc Holliday's "Build Your Own Bloody Mary" offers connoisseurs an endless list of options and add-ins for the cocktail, including bacon, pickles, cheese skewers, beef jerky, smoked sausage and your choice of vodka. Ladies and gentlemen, a salad in a glass. If Bloody Marys aren't your cup of tomato juice, though, Doc Holliday's has a full bar with all your favorite drafts, bottles, wines, liquors and mixers, and a selection of tasty bar bites to absorb it all. And the staff at Doc's is as fun and fast as they come. So come!

— TAMMY RAGUSA

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At Doc Holliday's,
the Bloody Mary
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LUKE BRYAN bids farewell to his spring break traditions with one final Panama City Beach blowout.

LAST HURRAH

STORY BY ANDREW LEAHEY

For years, Luke Bryan has been spending his spring breaks in Panama City Beach, Fla.

The trips started in college, back when he was still working his way toward a business management degree at Georgia Southern University. Every March, school would be postponed for a week, giving Luke the opportunity to hop into a car with his classmates and drive six hours to the Gulf of Mexico. There, surrounded by buddies, bikinis and Budweiser, he'd spend his days in the sand and his nights in the bars, making the sort of memories that would last long after classes resumed.

"I'd go down to Panama City and drink beer on the beach," he remembers, cracking a nostalgic smile. "I'd hit the bars and clubs that night. I'd chase the girls and do all of that. It was your pretty standard spring break activities."

About six years ago, Luke decided to kickstart a spring break tradition that would be anything but standard. He was still a relatively new artist at the time. His first album had been a big hit, but it was taking longer than anticipated to finish up a second record. Luke was expected to tour, which delayed the process even further. For a guy who just wanted to make music, he was finding himself in a difficult position . . . and his fans were the ones paying the price.

"I was going on two and a half years between albums coming out," he says, "and I had fans that were wanting more music. We wanted to create some kind of annual event for them, and we wanted to release more music that they could listen to on their iPods and in their cars."

PHOTO COURTESY LUKES NASHVILLE





More than 200,000 fans came out to see Luke's spring break concerts at Panama City Beach in 2014.

Luke realized he'd written more songs than his second album could possibly fit, including a handful of tunes that were inspired by his college trips to Panama City. He decided to release some of those songs on an EP, *Spring Break With All My Friends*, and throw a massive party in Panama City Beach to celebrate its release. Since all of the new songs were about spring break, it just made sense to hold the show in mid-March while thousands of college students were still in the middle of their weeklong vacations. His fans would have to wait a few more months for a full album, but that didn't mean they couldn't enjoy new material—as well as a killer show—in the meantime.

For Luke, heading down to Panama City Beach felt like returning to his home away from home. There, with 100,000 people in the audience, he

held his first spring break concert beside the Gulf of Mexico, singing and hip-swiveling his way through a show that emphasized everything he'd loved about his own spring break experiences: good music, great company and the thrill of forgetting about everyday life for one glorious weekend.

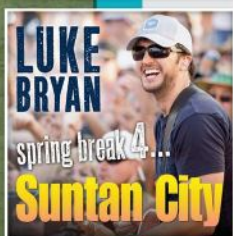
Before long, Luke was heading back to Panama City Beach every March, always with a new *Spring Break* EP in tow. It was a chance not only to perform for enormous crowds, but also to release new music on a regular basis. While other country stars waited years between albums, Luke only waited 12 months. Sometimes, he'd release an EP and a full-length album in the same year.

His annual concerts on the beach became bigger and bigger as the years went on. Two hundred thousand people showed up in 2014,

flooding the dance floor at Spinner Beach Club—a venue that Luke calls “the epicenter” of his spring break shows—and spilling out along the Panama City Beach waterfront in both directions. Two hundred thousand concertgoers might sound like an enormous payday for Luke, but the singer insists he does it for the fans, not the money. Case in point: the concerts are 100 percent free.

“That’s one of my favorite moments every year, just being on that stage and doing spring break shows,” he says. “It’s a fun situation. It’s just a big party on the beach. I’ve handed the mic to crew guys before, and they’ll get up there and do a freestyle moment and tear the beach down.”

“The shows are that loose, and it's fun when you can be that nonchalant. We’re not overthinking it to death. It’s the only show of the year where



Luke soaks up the rays and the applause at his fifth spring break concert series in 2012.



we don't do a set list. I just start calling 'em."

This March, Luke will retire the spring break project for good, after releasing *Spring Break* . . . *Checkin' Out* and playing a final pair of back-to-back beach shows. He's still a kid at heart, but he's also a family man who'll turn 40 in less than two years. If the Panama City Beach gigs have been Luke's way of keeping himself young—of keeping himself in a college-worthy state of mind—then the time has come to officially graduate.

"I've jokingly said, 'Hey, I've figured out a way to be a spring breaker through my 30s,'" he explains, "and I probably shouldn't push that luck. All good things must certainly come to an end. We'll leave this thing while we're

still on top—leave it with great feelings and great vibes. We've all had such a great time through the years. We just felt like it was time to move on."

It does feel like the right time to try something different. Luke began hinting at a new direction with his most recent album, *Crash My Party*, which hit stores during the summer of 2013. The album's first two singles, "Crash My Party" and "That's My Kind of Night," were party anthems filled with familiar images of roaring trucks and pretty country girls, but the next hit, "Drink a Beer," felt like something out of left field. Bryan didn't write "Drink a Beer"—that honor went to Chris Stapleton, a solo artist who'd previ-

ously performed with the bluegrass band The SteelDrivers, and Jim Beavers, who'd co-written Toby Keith's "Red Solo Cup" several years earlier—but he sang the song like it was his own creation, moved by its lyrics about life and loss.

He still remembers the first time he heard it.

"It got e-mailed to me," he says of the track, "and I listened to Chris [Stapleton's] guitar and vocal version. Man, it just slayed me. I played it for my bus driver and we were like, 'What a great tune.' I felt like the song would really change people. I knew it was amazingly emotional and powerful."

During "Drink a Beer," the song's narrator deals with the unexpected death of a friend by walking to the edge of a pier and chugging a cold one. Countless country songs have glorified alcohol over the years, but



Here's a toast to Luke's final album in the series, *Spring Break... Checkin' Out*, which drops on March 10 to coincide with his shows on March 11 and 12.



LUKE BRYAN CONTINUED

"Drink a Beer" flips the script, with Luke drinking his beer not out of celebration, but out of a combination of nostalgia and sorrow. It's the opposite of a party song. Years from now, it might even become known as the moment Luke stopped aiming for his audience's dancing shoes and started going after their heartstrings instead.

"It's such a powerful song live," he enthuses. "I love looking out and seeing how that song affects people. I think it's good to have that roller coaster—an up-and-down emotional situation with your music—so you can take people on an emotional ride. People

at a live show can't be going crazy the whole time. They've gotta catch their breath, too. We've always understood that. 'Drink a Beer,' and other songs of heavier subject matter, do that."

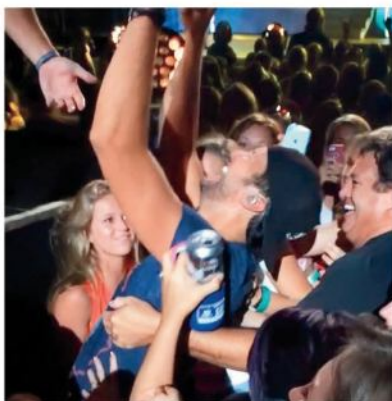
Truth be told, Luke could probably use a moment onstage to catch his breath, too. Last year, he took more than a few spills during his sold-out concerts. At a particularly rowdy show in Noblesville, Ind., he asked a crew member to toss a can of beer in his direction. Ever the showman, Luke flipped around in an attempt to catch the beer behind his back, then accidentally plunged into the crowd. Something similar happened at a

show in North Carolina, where Luke fell offstage and ripped up his leg in the process. The accident required several stitches. Talk about crashing someone's party.

"Will the intensity of my shows throughout the years become a little different than the intensity now?" he wonders. "I would imagine. The main thing is, my show will evolve as time evolves, and as long as I've got fans out there having a great time, I will never plan things to a T. I hate that. I like going off-the-cuff and reacting with the fans organically. I fight with my stage people and lighting people all the time, because they want me



Luke's been known to take unintentional stage dives during his live shows, so this year he's bringing Dustin Lynch and Randy Houser on tour to keep him grounded.



to be at a certain place at a certain point, and I've never really liked that. If I see somebody who catches my eye and I want to interact with that fan, I wanna be able to go spend time with them. Will I keep climbing on stuff and jumping around? Probably. I hope I'm in good enough shape that I can still do that. I'm sure as I grow older, though, I will have limitations."

Don't worry about Luke growing older just yet, though. *Spring Break ... Checkin' Out* is just as rowdy and rip-roaring as the six *Spring Break* releases that came before it, filled with 11 original songs about love, liquor and life on the beach. Bryan wrote the music with help from a few friends, and the songwriting sessions gave him a chance to stay in the springtime spirit year-round ... even during the dead of winter.

"We even came up with a couple songs while we were up on a deer hunt in Iowa," he remembers. "The song 'My Ol' Bronco' was started on that hunt. We were sitting in that tour bus when it was, like, negative 20 degrees outside, writing spring break songs."

Another track, "Spring Break-

down," was hashed out during a late-night jam session with Ashley Gorley and Zach Crowell. The three started writing the song at 8:30 p.m.—an unusual time for Luke, who insists he's usually in bed by 9:30 during his evenings at home—and came up with a moving tribute to the fans who've made Luke's beach shows such a success. Luke calls it "one of the more significant songs we've recorded."

"'Spring Breakdown' basically says, 'You're gonna make me break down and get emotional on you, because this is the last one,'" he continues. "It's kind of nostalgic, because I'm looking back on all the memories and all the fun we've had [in Panama City Beach]. It really tells a story of what my true emotion will be at those shows. I'm pretty bummed that it comes to an end, but I feel like it needs to."

When one door closes, though, another opens.

Luke is launching his first international tour this spring, playing seven different countries in nine days. Two months after returning to the United States, he'll head up to North Dakota for the beginning of his Kick Up the

Dust Tour, a cross-country trek that'll double as one of the biggest tours of his career. Dustin Lynch and Randy Houser have signed on as opening acts, with two bigger names—Florida Georgia Line and Thomas Rhett—joining the tour for a handful of supersized stadium gigs. Included in the mix are shows at Ford Field, where the Detroit Lions play, and Mile High Stadium, home of the Denver Broncos. It's not Luke's first time playing stadiums, but it is his first time playing this many during a single summer.

In other words, the guy is ready to play ball.

"This year is the last *Spring Break* release, and we're closing that chapter," he says. "But man, it's been an amazing chapter. It's been such a fun, creative process, where you can loosely record stuff and not beat yourself up over stuff too much. We really had fun. It was designed for us to have some fun and write some music and go play some shows, and it's been amazing. And what we have in store after this chapter ends will be amazing, too." **CW**



The Breakfast Club

Lady Antebellum meets the press to enjoy a morning meal and a lively chat about their upcoming tour.

(From left)
Dave Haywood,
Hillary Scott and
Charles Kelley

RECENTLY, SEVERAL MEMBERS OF the esteemed Nashville media got the chance to sit down with the members of Lady Antebellum for a Southern-style breakfast at Nashville restaurant Sinema, as the group fielded questions about their Wheels Up Tour 2015. The trio's Hillary Scott, Charles Kelley and Dave Haywood also talked about their early days in Nashville, charitable efforts for the upcoming year and other similarly hot topics.

Foremost on their minds was the tour, which actually kicked off overseas with stops in the U.K., Australia and Sweden, among other locales. They'll start playing for the home folks in May with a gig in Lubbock, Texas, and continue throughout the year. But what truly excited Charles, Hillary and Dave was the addition of Nashville's Bridgestone Arena to the tour on Sept. 11, which happens to be Charles' birthday. Hard to believe, but the award-winning threesome has never played the city's largest venue, outside of performing at awards shows.

Here are a few highlights from their press conference.

— BOB PAXMAN

Talk about having Hunter Hayes and Sam Hunt as the opening acts for the tour.

CHARLES: It's been an important thing for us to have a good package on tour. We want people to get there early and enjoy three or four hours of music at every show. A lot of times, you can discover an artist that way. It's a nice little variety.

HILLARY: I feel like they were a great fit. Personally, I listen to Sam's record [*Montevallo*] every day before a show. [*Laughs*] All of the girls will be very happy when they come to this tour, with Sam and Hunter and these two handsome gentlemen here.

DAVE: I think we hit the lottery with openers, for sure.

What took so long to finally play Bridgestone Arena?

C: We've talked about doing this for the longest time. It's always a scary thing. Nashville is

very industry-heavy, obviously, and you know that there will be a lot of [your] peers here. So, you want to make sure going into it that you're ready and that you feel like you're at a point in your career where you can fill it up. We feel confident in ourselves as a band. If we had done it four years ago, our show wasn't really there. [Now] we feel like it's time.

D: It's truly a "bucket list" show. It's our first time being on that stage, other than the award shows. We felt like this was the year. That will be a special night for us.

How exciting is it to play Nashville?

D: It's where we started. We played a lot at [Nashville club] 3rd & Lindsley, which is just a couple blocks away from Bridgestone. They always let us play every few weeks. We'd set up our own gear and hang

around afterward and sell merchandise. I think we'd make about 150 dollars total. Nashville becomes such an important place to play. I hate that we've had to skip it so many times.

H: All I've ever known is this city. [*Hillary was born and raised in Nashville.*] People have asked me over and over again, "When are you going to play Bridgestone Arena?" It's great to be able to say, "Now, we are."

You are known for giving back to the community. Where will your charitable efforts be directed this year?

H: We have an organization called LadyAid, which is for different nonprofits that are involved with children in some capacity. We'll definitely be continuing that. I think a portion of every concert ticket will go to that, which will help those organizations. And, honestly,

anything to do with our military veterans—we're always looking for an opportunity to support them. We do whatever we can because they sacrifice so much. That is such a big part of who we are.

C: It does seem that there is a huge importance put on these charities, especially in our industry. We have been given a ton, that goes without saying. Now we feel a responsibility to give back.

Are you planning any surprises for the tour?

C: You've got to pick your bells and whistles. There will be some kind of 747 references, I'm sure [*in keeping with the title of their latest album*]. We've never had a tour that has stayed the same. It's constant tweaking and moving around. I won't give it away, but [for this tour] we've got something that looks pretty dadgum cool. **CW**



Tourmates Sam Hunt (left) and Hunter Hayes are ready to take off with Lady A.

[ON THE ROAD]

Life Is a Carnival!

Enjoy
the ride as
"God Made Girls"
singer **RAELYNN**
shares with
CW a day in
her life.

STORY
BY
ANNIE
REUTER

PHOTOS
BY
DREW
GURIAN



G

rowing up, RaeLynn (born Racheal Lynn Woodward) idolized Miranda Lambert, her favorite singer and fellow Texan who made a name for herself as a country artist. Now the

20-year-old bubbly Baytown native and former contestant on *The Voice* is living her dream on tour with the “Little Red Wagon” singer and couldn’t be more excited.

Country Weekly spent the day with RaeLynn on Feb. 6 during a tour stop in Freehold, N.J., where she was headlining her own show while on a brief break from Miranda’s Certified Platinum Tour. In between sound-check, meet-and-greets and the show, RaeLynn gave *CW* a glimpse into her wardrobe and detailed her friendship with Miranda. RaeLynn, who has had diabetes since she was 12, even opened up on how she handles the disease while traveling.

RaeLynn first learned she was invited on Miranda’s tour from her manager and quickly called the singer directly to say thank you. Miranda picked up the phone and praised her new tourmate, telling RaeLynn how much she believes in her as an artist.

“One thing I love about Miranda is that she champions young artists and young women,” RaeLynn says with a big smile. “She wants to help and that’s what I love about her. I want to be that kind of artist. There’s room for everybody.”

Sitting backstage in the green-room in black leggings, brown Uggs and a purple hoodie, the “God Made Girls” singer adds that one quality she takes from Miranda is that “you should never be rude to anybody.”

And RaeLynn is the antithesis of rude. After arriving in Freehold shortly after 1:30 p.m. at the iPlay America’s Event Center—which doubles as a concert venue and indoor carnival with arcade games, laser tag, go-carts, boardwalk games and rides—it’s time for lunch. In the midst of ordering food she lights up like a kid learning she is going to Disney World for the first time upon

RAELYNN CONTINUED

hearing there is laser tag, go-carts, a 3-D zombie game and a candy store on the premises.

"Did you hear there's a 3-D zombie game?" she asks her tour manager, Marcus. "You put on glasses and you shoot all these zombies. That's amazing! And there's a massive candy store. Things like this really excite me. Whoever decided to make this into a con-

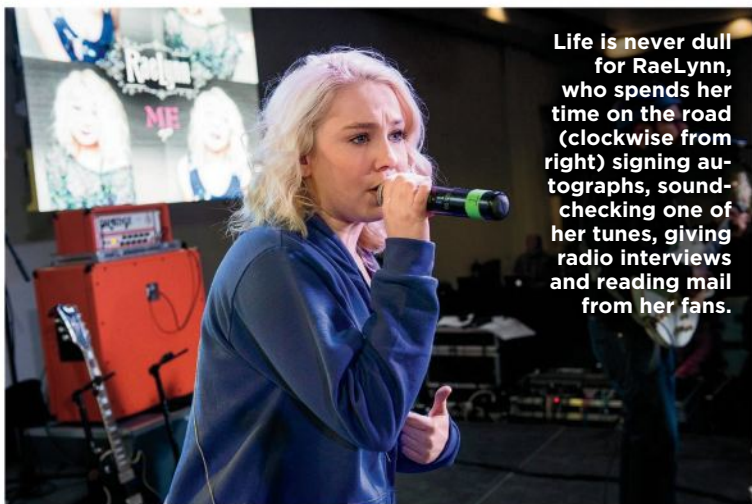
cert venue is genius. Hashtag genius!"

While hanging out with RaelLynn, it's nearly impossible to be in a bad mood, as she is a ball of never-ending energy and infectious smiles despite getting up early for a radio visit. She flew into New York the night before and says she's been up since 7:30 a.m. During a typical day she usually starts with a large breakfast. "I always love to eat an omelet or some

kind of really big breakfast," she says. On the way to her first stop of the day, New Jersey radio station Thunder 106 in Neptune, she chats with her mom on the phone.

"She always calls me in the morning, checking up on me to see what I'm doing."

RaeLynn also tries her best to stay fit on the road. When she's not prepping for the show or signing hundreds of



Life is never dull for RaelLynn, who spends her time on the road (clockwise from right) signing autographs, sound-checking one of her tunes, giving radio interviews and reading mail from her fans.



EPs and promo photos for fans, she'll squeeze in a workout with Miranda.

"Since we're in arenas we do a lot of stair steppers. You can actually get a really good workout in an arena because of all the stairs. I feel like my butt's looking really good after all the squats and stairs I've been doing," she notes, laughing, before reflecting on her friendship with Miranda. "To have someone go from being your

favorite country artist to being your genuine, really good friend . . . I just am thankful. I never thought my inspiration growing up would be so inspired and excited about my music."

Her bandmates enter the green-room and she kisses them on the cheek and asks how they're doing. They've had a few days off and quickly catch up. While RaeLynn admits it's a struggle being away from her family

and friends back home, she says her band is her second family. And on the days she really misses home, she takes out her camouflage hoodie.

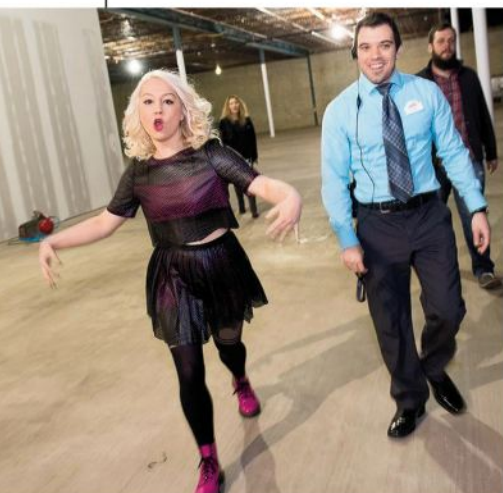
"I have this one hoodie that's so old and gross. It's not gross, it's clean," she says, grinning. "But it's this camo hoodie that I've had forever. I will never get rid of it. I take it on every trip because it makes me feel like I'm home."

RaeLynn then shows off her ward-



(Clockwise from left) As a diabetic, RaeLynn has to monitor her sugar and watch her diet; she's a ruthless bumper car driver; fans lined up early for the show; RaeLynn stocked up on sweets; the pink boots are always the right choice for any outfit, including the '80s glam ensemble she chose.





(Left) Even when she's not onstage, RaeLynn is entertaining. But in front of a crowd, she's right at home.



RAELYNN CONTINUED

robe bag with the same excitement she had earlier for the 3-D zombie game.

"Clothes! Should I wear this with my matching skirt?" she asks as she holds up a black-and-pink leather mesh top.

"Will you wear your pink Dr. Martens?" her publicist asks.

"Duh!" Rae responds as she begins to show everything in her wardrobe. "I have lots of fun outfits. Here's my mermaid outfit. My mermaid shorts. I have really crazy stuff. This is a see-through skirt I have and I wear shorts under it. My sparkly leggings. My cool bomber jacket. Oh, I have a cool Care Bears crop top that's awesome!"

As the door opens and some appetizers are brought in, Rae screams, "Yes! Food!" to which one of her bandmates jokes, "She also gets ex-

cited about food." The platters have hummus, guacamole, vegetable slices and pita chips.

"I try to stay pretty healthy on the road not just to be healthy, but because I have diabetes," she says. "When you have diabetes it's important to have a lot of high protein and stay on that diet."

RaeLynn goes to the doctor every three months for a checkup, and while she's used to giving insulin shots to herself every day, she's relieved that she'll be switching to an insulin pump soon.

"A month ago I had a minor seizure because my sugar got too low. That's why you have checkups, so that doesn't happen. It is scary," she says gravely. "That's why I have to be so careful about what I eat and make sure I eat after I take my insulin."

The self-proclaimed "foodie" also loves coffee and will often search for local coffee shops at tour stops on the road. Sometimes she even invites fans to meet her at Starbucks to take photos.

"That's so much fun for me, too. Surprise meet-and-greet!"

That night, RaeLynn has two meet-and-greets on the schedule and she's excited. Fans often give her gifts, which is something she loves. At her first meet-and-greet she spends 35 minutes chatting with fans from her fan club, taking photos and thanking them.

"I got a unicorn!" she shouts to her publicist after one fan gives her a unicorn stuffed animal. Another gives her a unicorn shirt while a young girl sings her a song. Back in the green-room, RaeLynn reads through the letters and a song someone wrote her.



"The coolest part is the things the fans give me," she says as she looks over her gifts and opens the letters. "It's just weird because this is exactly how I felt about Miranda and now people do that for me."

It's getting closer to showtime and RaeLynn is in her dressing room, which is really a makeshift kitchen with big mirrors, as she touches up her makeup and hairsprays her short blond locks.

"Bigger the hair the better," she says. "The higher the hair, the closer to God."

Once she's done getting ready she and the band go over the set list for the evening before she's invited to visit the candy shop by the venue's manager.

"I'll take you to the candy shop," she sings in her best 50 Cent impression. "Y'all, we're going to the candy shop!"

It's nearing showtime, so she takes the back entrance through the kitchen with security so the 600-plus fans don't spot her on her escapade to the candy shop. Once there, the manager tells RaeLynn she can take anything from three walls of the shop.

"This is the most amazing thing I've seen in my life! I want some M&M's. They're on my mind right now. Pink M&M's! Why do the Grammys have to be so close to this?" she asks rhetorically.

She then spots the gummy worms section and fills a bag full of sour worms before she sees the baby gummy bears.

"It's like a family of gummy bears!"

After filling up several bags with jellybeans and jawbreakers for her band, she comes to a harsh realization.

"I have diabetes. Let's remember

I have diabetes, guys. I can't have a lot. This will last me a year," she says. "Candy is my love language."

After a few handfuls of candy back in the greenroom, RaeLynn checks her insulin levels before she does her vocal warm-ups. Minutes before her performance, she gets in a prayer circle with her band. As the guys head to the stage, RaeLynn stands back and becomes quiet, taking it all in as the audience chants her name.

"Our dream is for people to relate to what we write," she said earlier in the day. "There's nothing cooler to see than fans singing your songs."

As she wraps her set, she saves "God Made Girls" for last, a song that everyone knows the words to.

"Thank you for making my dreams come true," she says as she finishes the song and walks offstage. **CW**



FRONT-ROW SEATS

Online concert series Skyville Live brings the magic to your home.

THOUGH A RELATIVELY recent entry to the lexicon, FOMO—or fear of missing out—should be a concept familiar to anyone who has skipped an event and then suffered through friends’ excited next-day recollections. It can force a person to go out in spite of exhaustion or other obligations.

Thankfully, technology is working quickly to close the gap for people who can’t spend every night out and about. Here in Nashville, the online streaming concert series Skyville Live launched in January and brought an intimate concert of multigenerational talent into Internet-connected homes via skyvillelive.com.

On that first show were Martina McBride, soul legend Gladys Knight and rising R&B star Estelle. Celebrating the success of her soul project *Everlasting*, Martina played many of that album’s songs in addition to her classic “A Broken Wing.” Estelle’s performances included “American Boy,” a 2008 pop hit, and Gladys naturally reprised her immortal Jim Weatherly-penned tunes “Midnight Train to Georgia” and “Neither One of Us (Wants to Be the First to Say Goodbye).” All three women took turns collaborating throughout the evening.

“For me, this is as good as it gets



(From left) Estelle, Gladys Knight and Martina McBride find the groove. (Right) Martina consults with Skyville Live co-creator Wally Wilson.



right here,” said Martina during rehearsals for the show. “Also, just being able to reach out to your audience in a new way, where we can come into their homes and they can get a sneak peek into a live show, it’s just really cool.”

The others concurred, with Gladys particularly excited about the different styles being mixed on the stage. “Diversity is what our world is all about from one end to the other,” she said. “So when we bring our gifts together, especially in a situation where you respect those people you are performing with, it’s just a joy.”

Estelle touched on how excited she was to watch and learn from two veterans who have paved the way, especially since the major-label world has changed considerably since Gladys was on the charts. “As long as I’ve been in it I still feel like I just came in,” she said. “We don’t get a chance to meet the legends, we don’t get a chance to meet people who have done it and can show us a road map. So it’s an opportunity for me to see how to do it and also to sharpen up and be my best.”

That diverse, multigenerational character of the series was an important aspect for co-creator/producer Wally Wilson, who named it after the production and development company he started

with producer Paul Worley.

“My idea was to do baby acts, and an Internet act that had broad reach and an iconic act,” explains Wally, who initially used the Skyville Live name as a showcase series for the company’s new acts. “That is the formula for the show but it’s not hard and fast. It’s the basic thing that we do but we add and subtract from that.”

Wally called on his brother-in-law Raul Malo of The Mavericks to have the band perform for the test streaming show, and the viewer traffic exceeded his modest expectations. He knew he was on to something and recruited Seattle-based Dan Bean to handle the technology and Hollywood-based Tisha Fein to book the talent. Wally was adamant that, despite the show’s Nashville origins, it not be an exclusively country show.

“We have a lot of country acts on there but I want to make certain that what I think is great music gets out there,” says Wally. “So I think musical integrity in the show is very, very important.” True to that philosophy, the next Skyville Live show, on April 7, will combine the talents of Kris Kristofferson, Lady Antebellum and acclaimed singer/songwriter Jason Isbell.

Wally also stresses that future

shows will make for what he calls “magic moments” by putting artists in situations that would be unusual for them. “[We want] to take them out of their normal comfort zone and put them in an environment that’s every bit as good as their environment musically, but different, and give them a new experience and give the audience a new experience,” he says.

Estelle, for instance, was blown away by the fact that they were actually using a live band for the nearly two-hour show. “No one sings live anymore!” she said. “They told me there was going to be a band, I was like, I’ll be there!” She’s reportedly planning to come back to Nashville to do some writing and recording.

But adding to that idea of new experiences and magical moments, the first Skyville Live show closed with Gladys, Martina and Estelle regrouping to sing the Boyz II Men smash “End of the Road” with a gospel sort of reverence. “People left in tears. People left the soundstage literally in tears from this song,” says Wally.

It probably goes without saying, but you definitely don’t want to miss out on that.

— JON FREEMAN

CLASSIC STYLE

JIM ED BROWN
returns to the
spotlight after
a scary bout with
lung cancer.

THE LAST FEW MONTHS must have seemed like the longest of Jim Ed Brown's life, as he was undergoing chemotherapy for lung cancer. But now the 80-year-old Grand Ole Opry legend can happily say he is in remission.

On Jan. 30, he returned to the Opry stage after a five-month absence and was welcomed with open arms by family and friends in attendance. The response left Jim Ed feeling a bit overwhelmed and grateful for the many people who kept him in their prayers through one of the scariest times of his life.

"It felt so fantastic to step back into the circle again and see all my friends smiling back at me," says Jim Ed, seated at the kitchen table in his home in Nashville. His eyes twinkle beneath the baseball cap covering his hair, which is slowly growing back after treatment. "It just felt so good to be singing again, especially when it's at the Opry, where you can see all your peers and all the people you know there. It's always good when you get to see your friends!"

During the months he spent at home recovering, Jim Ed never grew tired of the love shown by his fans,



many of whom sent their well wishes through the mail. "You wouldn't believe the stack of cards I've got downstairs. It's amazing," he says with a smile. "The good Lord had to look at

all those prayers coming in and he had to have a sense of humor. He probably said, 'Who in the world is this Jim Ed Brown that everybody is wanting me to do something for?' He had to come down here and look at me with all that going on! It's been great, though. Without Him, I don't think I would be here now, at least this far."

These days, Jim Ed is still building his strength back after losing much of his muscle mass. He also came down with the flu during treatment, causing him to lose quite a bit of weight. But even with those setbacks, Jim Ed has kept his humor and positive thinking intact with each passing

JIM ED COURTESY WEBSTER; JIM ED IN STUDIO AND WITH SISTERS COURTESY JIM ED BROWN FACEBOOK



From posing for a circa-1960s pic with his sisters Maxine and Bonnie to recording in the studio in 2014, Jim Ed proves he's always been in style.



day. "I needed to lose a few pounds anyway," he says with a chuckle. "I can get back in clothes that I couldn't get into a year or two ago. It's a great way to start the new year!"

"But in all honesty," he adds, on a serious note, "I am doing much better now. I can walk without a cane, and I no longer have to hold on to the wall or something. I can go up and down the steps pretty easy, so I'm doing great."

Coinciding with the new year and his clean bill of health, Jim Ed returned to his hosting duties on the weekly *Country Music Greats Radio Show*, as well as released his new

album, *In Style Again*. The project marks Jim Ed's first studio album in nearly three decades, and has him collaborating with the likes of The Whites, Vince Gill and his siblings The Browns. "This last time sure was a lot of fun," he says of going into the recording studio. "There are some good songs on this one. It was fun to get back in the studio with The Browns again because that's a sound that has never been duplicated. Then Vince Gill—he is such a nice feller and such a great singer, isn't he? Golly!"

Slowly but surely, Jim Ed has also been returning to the road in sup-

port of the new music, including recent stops in Florida and an upcoming run through Texas scheduled for March. It sounds like a lot to juggle given the circumstances, but Jim Ed is ready for the challenges of doing it all even better than before. "I just love it," he says, beaming. "I love to work, and I love to be busy. I've got a whole lot of new songs that I am ready to sing, so I've got to get better quick, haven't I? But I'll tell you . . . my fans haven't missed me as much as I've missed them. I sure am ready to get back out there and see my friends."

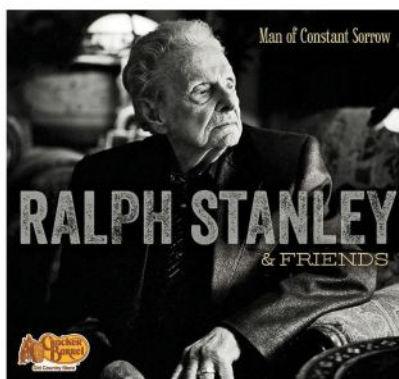
— ALANNA CONAWAY

THE GOOD DOCTOR

DR. RALPH STANLEY ROUNDS UP SOME FAMOUS FRIENDS AND ADMIRERS FOR HIS NEW DUETS ALBUM.

STORY BY BOB PAXMAN

It's a rare artist indeed who can list among his friends the likes of Dierks Bentley, Lee Ann Womack, rock titan Robert Plant and the entire collective of Old Crow Medicine Show. Bluegrass standard-bearer Dr. Ralph Stanley can count these legendary folks among his close friends and certainly admirers, and he enlists their able-bodied help on his new album, aptly titled



Ralph Stanley & Friends: Man of Constant Sorrow. The album is currently in release and available exclusively at all Cracker Barrel Old Country Stores and crackerbarrel.com.

Eleven of the album's 13 cuts feature duets between Dr. Ralph and a variety of guests, with Ralph going solo on his classic "Hills of Home" and "Man of Constant Sorrow," his most famous work. The bluegrass patriarch joined his grandson

RALPH STANLEY: JEFFREY WILSON; RALPH STANLEY & FRIENDS: PERRY LYNCH/OLD COUNTRY STORES

(Right) Dr. Ralph Stanley (seated center) with his band, The Clinch Mountain Boys; (below right) Ralph plays the Wheeler Opera House in Colorado with his grandson (and band member) Nathan Stanley.



Nathan Stanley and co-producer Jim Lauderdale, both of whom appear on the album, to talk about this latest effort and share stories behind some of the outstanding duets.

CALL YOUR BUDS

Dr. Ralph, a soft-spoken man who fairly well epitomizes the virtue of humility, gives all credit to grandson Nathan and co-producers Jim Lauderdale and Buddy Miller for round-

ing up the all-star gallery. "I'm proud that we could get this group together," says Dr. Ralph, still a traveling trouser at age 88. "Nathan did most of that work himself."

Nathan, who travels and plays with his grandfather and also enjoys a solo career in bluegrass and gospel, amiably deflects the compliment. "Jim and Buddy played the big part in getting all the artists together," Nathan says. "I did suggest a few

that we would like to have and they did their best to get them. Jim and Buddy gave the artists the freedom to pick which Ralph Stanley song they would like to record with him."

Jim remembers jotting down a "wish list" of performers with Buddy. Every one of those wishes, without exception, was granted, which hardly surprised the two producers. Still, getting rockers like Robert Plant and Elvis Costello, who have the clout to



Ralph and Dierks Bentley sit down for a studio session; (left) Ralph tears into the banjo at Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival in San Francisco; (above left) with Nathan away from the stage.

RALPH STANLEY CONT.

pick and choose whatever projects meet their fancy, is certainly a musical coup for anyone.

It all comes down to a show of respect, notes Jim. “Everybody was jumping at the chance to work and record with Ralph,” he remembers. “We didn’t get turned down by anyone. Dr. Ralph has had such an impact on music, and that’s why they all wanted to be on this album.”

“Well, those are such nice words,” Dr. Ralph interjects, drawing laughs from Jim and Nathan. “Really, it felt good to get to do something like this.”

DYNAMIC DUETS

Ralph Stanley & Friends gets underway in stirring fashion with Ralph’s gospel-tinged “We Shall Rise,” featuring Josh Turner and Ralph’s band, The Clinch Mountain Boys. Josh’s signature bass voice, punctuated by some

slip-and-slide vocal gymnastics, provides the punch that just may make even an avowed heathen shout out a “hallelujah” and plead for an “amen.”

“Josh actually picked that song to do,” Jim recalls. “I think he told me that the song was off the first Ralph Stanley record he ever bought and that’s where he first heard the song.” Jim pauses momentarily and adds, “You know, I think Buddy and I recommended something else. But we realized that this was a powerful way to kick it all off. Josh sounds great on it.”

Nathan joins forces with grandpa Ralph on “Rank Stranger,” another Stanley classic. This one was a natural, as Nathan describes. “It was such a good choice from Jim and Buddy,” Nathan says. “My grandfather and I perform it live at every show we do. We only needed like two or three takes in the studio because we were so used to singing it.”

It’s also a true favorite of Stanley-

philes around the world, Nathan tacks on. “I would say that ‘Rank Stranger’ is probably the most requested song we get from fans everywhere we go,” he says with enthusiasm. “It is one of those timeless songs that whenever you mention Ralph Stanley’s career, people will know ‘Man of Constant Sorrow’ and ‘O Death’ but ‘Rank Stranger’ will fall in the top five.”

Robert Plant, the ex-Led Zeppelin frontman and avowed bluegrass buff, selected “Two Coats” for his performance with Ralph. Jim explains that Buddy Miller, who played in Robert’s bluegrass/Americana aggregation Band of Joy, served as the contact man for Robert’s appearance.

“Buddy was able to get in touch with him and work it out with his schedule,” Jim explains. “Robert was really tickled to be on the record. He is such a Ralph Stanley fan and I think that shows the breadth of Ralph’s influence. You know, here is somebody

THE CUTS

HERE IS THE 13-SONG TRACK LIST OF *RALPH STANLEY & FRIENDS: MAN OF CONSTANT SORROW* WITH GUEST ARTISTS.

"We Shall Rise"
with Josh Turner

"I Only Exist"
with Dierks Bentley

**"Sweethearts
in Heaven"**
with Ricky Skaggs

"Rank Stranger"
with Nathan
Stanley

**"I Am the Man,
Thomas"**
with Buddy Miller
and Jim Lauderdale

"White Dove"
with Lee Ann
Womack

"Red Wicked Wine"
with Elvis Costello

"Pig in a Pen"
with Gillian Welch
and David Rawlings

"Two Coats"
with Robert Plant

**"Brand New
Tennessee Waltz"**
with Del McCoury

**"Short Life of
Trouble"**
with Old Crow
Medicine Show

"Hills of Home"

**"Man of Constant
Sorrow"**

who is one of the biggest rock stars who ever lived, and he wanted to do this with us. Robert really appreciates the roots of music and the masters that have been among us."

KEEPING THE FIRE

Ralph Stanley certainly stands as one of those masters. From his early days in the 1940s as one-half of the Stanley Brothers duo with brother Carter, Ralph has been one of the most distinctive artists in bluegrass. Ralph and Carter, unlike many groups of their era, wrote their own songs, and the catalog includes standards like "Little Maggie," "Angel Band" and the tune that brought him to prominence in the new century, "Man of Constant Sorrow." That song, from the soundtrack to the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, connected with a new generation of listeners and brought fans into the bluegrass fold who likely swore that they would never listen to a blue-

grass record. In 2002, Ralph received his first-ever Grammy award for his haunting rendition of the dirge "O Death," from the *O Brother* film.

Now, at 88, he still keeps up a busy touring schedule while maintaining a home in his native Virginia. When logistics allow, Ralph will play the Grand Ole Opry, which he joined in 2000.

"When we're close enough to Nashville," Ralph says, "we'll always come and do the Opry. I love to do that show." In fact, he simply loves to perform, wherever his travels take him. And retirement? Not in the cards, at least for now.

"I'm ready for a good bit of touring," he says, in his understated manner. "As long as the good Lord will let me, I'm going to keep playing for the people."

That buoyant attitude, in turn, inspires younger folks like grandson Nathan and Jim Lauderdale. "I've never seen anybody like him, singing the way he does and everything," Nathan

proudly raves. "When he gets up on the stage, it's his, from the first song to the last. His voice is sounding just as good as ever."

Jim chimes in, "It is inspiring. He still gets a kick out of performing, and that is a great lesson for all of us, not to take this for granted."

And who knows? A second collaboration album is a strong possibility, as Jim suggests. "I think we'll have to do another one, because there were a lot of people that we just couldn't get to," Jim says with a laugh. "There are so many people who want to work with Ralph. We didn't have much time to get this one together so I think we can do another down the road. Since we're doing this for Cracker Barrel, I'll just say that we'll serve this one up for now. I think fans are going to love it."

In his low-key way, Ralph adds the clincher, if you will. "I had a great time working with everyone," he says. "I think it turned out real well." **CW**



SINGLES

MIRANDA LAMBERT

“Little Red Wagon”

RCA RECORDS NASHVILLE

GRADE: B+

Early in her career, Miranda Lambert was sort of pigeonholed as the trash-talking firebrand who suffered no fools and exacted revenge for male misdeeds. With each successive release, however, she has shown different sides of her personality and artistry, revealing a complex, versatile talent that isn't 100 percent one way or another. That's

great and wonderful, but it's still fun to hear her back in spitfire mode on the new single, “Little Red Wagon,” from *Platinum*, her fifth album. *You only love me for my big sunglasses, my Tony Lamas and my Dodge Dart Classic*, she taunts in the opening lines, and only gets more brash from there. Instead of putting a cheating man in his place, this time Miranda is rebuffing anyone who would dare try to slow her down or make her change who she is. Musically, the track benefits from a strong use of dynamics: a four-on-the-floor kick drum in the first verse gives way to ferocious garage rock in the cho-

ruses, which pulls back to a funky little strut when her band members *ooh* and *aah* with her. Lyrically, the tune—written by Audra Mae and Joe Ginsberg—is on the silly side of cheeky, definitely not the serious fare we've come to associate with Miranda in recent years. But listening back to her albums, that's probably more a product of marketing and consumerism than anything else. Like the way Miranda snarls in this song, that ain't her fault.

— JON FREEMAN

AT A GLANCE: Get a ride while you can—this one is going places.

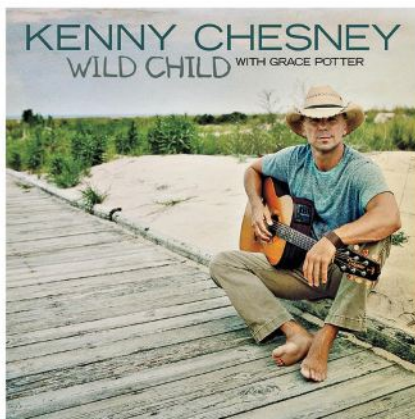
KENNY CHESNEY (WITH GRACE POTTER)

"Wild Child"

BLUE CHAIR/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE

GRADE: B+

Whether or not it was the intent, this certainly throws a bucket of cold water on the still-hot bro-country trend. Where you would expect a song with this title to make countless references to tan lines, short shorts and trapeze acts in the sack, this particular "Wild Child" speaks to a woman's spirit and, dare we say, inner beauty. The tempo also throws you a curve. Kenny and duet partner Grace deliver this in an acoustic, folk style, giving it a light and breezy feel. Grace's backing vocal provides a nice, clear complement to Kenny's lead, and they sound as perfectly matched as they did on "You and Tequila." Those who prefer



party guy Kenny might find this a bit too mellow for their tastes. But give this bit of introspection a chance and you'll find some cool lyrics (*So simple yet experimental / Innocent but still a little wild child*) and a fine message.

— BOB PAXMAN

AT A GLANCE: It's really more "mild," but you might go wild over this.

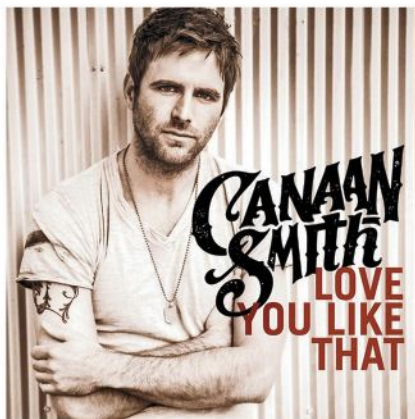
CANAAN SMITH

"Love You Like That"

MERCURY RECORDS

GRADE: B-

There is something innately likable about Canaan Smith. Warm, sincere and down-to-earth, he's the guy you'd want to be your best friend as much as you'd want him to sing another song around the fire pit in the backyard. With his newest single, Canaan is adding another dimension to his persona and his catalog by coming off a bit more sexy and a lot more edgy than on his previous single, "We Got Us." The arrangement starts lean with tinkling acoustic guitar and banjo, bass and drums, but builds to a heavily produced track, thick with instrumentation including a ripping electric guitar and acoustic-turned-electro. It makes for an infectious, albeit repetitious, groove. In a way, though, the repetition is what adds to the sexiness of the tune, giving it a slow-rolling feeling. Lyri-



cally, "Love You Like That," which Canaan co-wrote with hit songwriting brothers Jim and Brett Beavers, does employ a handful of country music buzzwords that seem a little unnecessary given the incredible talent of the writers, but it balances itself out with a chorus of Southern imagery that is intoxicating.

— TAMMY RAGUSA

AT A GLANCE: Love Canaan, like "Love You Like That."



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Spotlighting artists who
reside on the fringes
of country music

LARKIN POE

FOR FANS OF:

Miranda Lambert, The Allman
Brothers Band, Bonnie Raitt

DON'T LET THE BLACK leather, rhinestone-studded camisoles and dangling boho jewelry fool you—Larkin Poe's rootsy, bluesy, soulful sound is made for country. If the names of the sisters that comprise the duo, Rebecca and Megan Lovell, sound familiar, it's likely because you've heard plenty of buzz about them starting as far back as 2007. That's when, joined by their sister Jessica, they performed at MerleFest and won many fans, including headliner Elvis Costello.

"They came out and stole the show on a big opening-night bluegrass jam," says Elvis, who has toured and recorded with the duo on several occasions. "They were so confident and accomplished, I had no idea how young they were."

Although the sisters were teens when they performed at MerleFest, they were musical old souls, having studied classical music since they were kids. Proof of their chops? Listen to their latest album, *Kin*, with tracks ranging from Eric Church-style country rock on "Elephant" and "Jailbreak" to folk country with soaring harmonies on "Crown of Fire" and "High Horse" to piano-based tunes (think Sarah McLachlan) like "Overachiever."

Their classical training, it turns out, gave them the technical skills to be great improvisers.

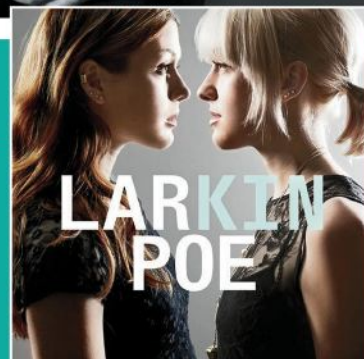


(From left) Sisters Megan and Rebecca Lovell of Larkin Poe

ESSENTIAL LISTENING:

- "Jailbreak"
- "Crown of Fire"
- "Jesse"
- "We Intertwine"

All songs from *Kin*. For more info, please visit larkinpoe.com.



"Starting out musically within the structure and relative rigidity of classical music, we absolutely fell in love with the spontaneity and improvisation of roots music," says lap steel and Dobro wizard Megan.

"Having grown up making music in the bluegrass and Americana fold, country music is second nature to us," adds lead singer and guitar/mandolin master Rebecca. "As kids, we listened to Hank Williams, Johnny Cash and Loretta Lynn just as much as Bach and Mozart—or, for that matter, Pink Floyd and Ozzy Osbourne!"

And though they can play almost

any music, they still relish the drive of country-roots music. That's won them the respect of high-profile musicians such as Kristian Bush, who has frequently hired them for high-profile gigs.

"I love playing with Larkin Poe because they're willing to go wherever I'm going. Megan just played 'Trailer Hitch' with me on *Conan*, and we've got dance moves in the song," he says. "She doesn't miss a beat or a slide part, even when I'm making her do crazy things with that 20-pound steel guitar slung around her neck."

— NANCY DUNHAM

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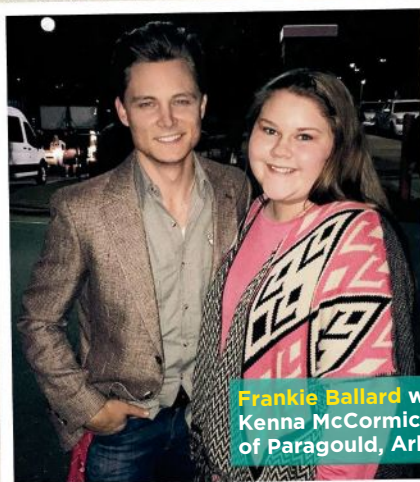
→ Country Weekly readers rub elbows with their favorite stars . . .



The Swon Brothers
with Bob Radtke of
Appleton, Wis.



Brantley Gilbert with
Daisha Lynn Fowler
of Tulsa, Okla.



Frankie Ballard with
Kenna McCormick
of Paragould, Ark.

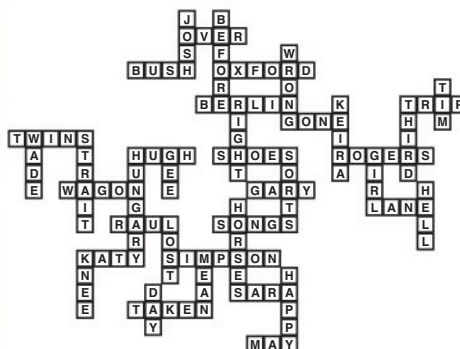


Aaron Tippin with
Kim Woodyard of
Pearisburg, Va.



RaeLynn with
Mary Riel of
Auburn, Wash.

CROSSWORD SOLUTION (See Page 78)



WANT YOUR FAN PHOTO PUBLISHED IN COUNTRY WEEKLY?

Send photos to Stars Up Close, *Country Weekly*, 506 2nd Avenue South, Suite 200, Nashville, TN 37210, or submit online (no duplicate submissions, please) at CountryWeekly.com/fanphotos. Be sure to include the name, hometown and state of each person pictured. Publication is not guaranteed; photos cannot be returned.

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[FLASHBACK]

THIS WEEK IN COUNTRY



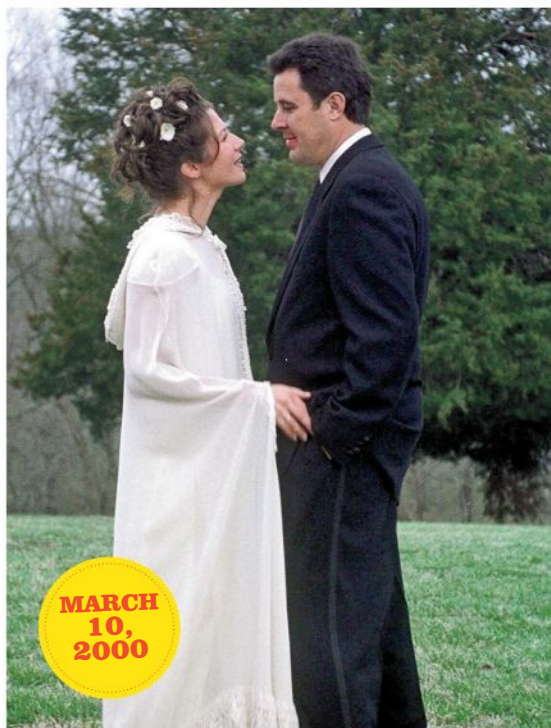
**MARCH
9,
1991**

For **ALAN JACKSON**, the fifth time proved the charm. Alan's first four singles found considerable chart success but he had yet to score a No. 1 hit. His romantic ballad "I'd Love You All Over Again" finally did the trick. Alan wrote the song for his wife, Denise, from the point of view of a man looking back on 10 years of marriage. The tune hit No. 1 on March 9, 1991, giving Alan the first chart-topper of his career.

DIERKS BENTLEY was a hot item right out of the box, with his first single, the fun-loving "What Was I Thinkin'," going No. 1. Dierks' self-titled debut album also racked up impressive numbers. Released in 2003, the album featured "What Was I Thinkin'" along with future hits "My Last Name" and "How Am I Doin'," which reached the Top 5. The album landed at No. 4 on the charts and was certified platinum for sales of 1 million copies on March 15, 2005.



**MARCH
15,
2005**



**MARCH
10,
2000**

Congratulations to **VINCE GILL** and wife **AMY GRANT**, who celebrate 15 years of marriage this year. Vince and Amy were married March 10, 2000, at an outdoor ceremony in Nashville, in front of family and several members of the music industry. Vince and Amy have one child together, daughter Corrina, born March 12, 2001.

BIRTHDAYS



MARCH 14, 1970

KRISTIAN BUSH

was born in Knoxville, Tenn. He is one-half of the duo Sugarland as well as a singer, songwriter and producer. Kristian's solo album *Southern Gravity*, featuring the single "Trailer Hitch," is set to be released in April.

MARCH 9, 1936
MICKEY GILLEY

MARCH 9, 1948
JIMMIE FADDEN
of the Nitty
Gritty Dirt Band

MARCH 10, 1983
CARRIE
UNDERWOOD

MARCH 10, 1989
RACHEL REINERT
of Gloria

MARCH 11, 1955
JIMMY FORTUNE
of The Statler Brothers

MARCH 13, 1930
JAN HOWARD

MARCH 14, 1945
MICHAEL MARTIN
MURPHEY

To read more on **Kristian Bush**, go to CountryWeekly.com/magazine/vault

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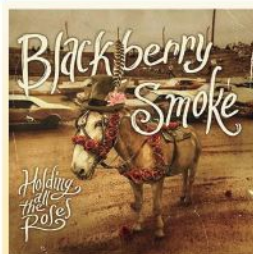
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[CHARTS]

WEEK ENDING FEB. 28, 2015

ALBUMS



Country-rock band Blackberry Smoke embraces its first No. 1 album and biggest sales week to date (19,000 units sold) as its fourth studio album debuts on top.

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	TITLE/ARTIST
1	—	HOLDING ALL THE ROSES BLACKBERRY SMOKE
2	1	MONTEVALLO SAM HUNT
3	2	OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT JASON ALDEAN
4	4	ANYTHING GOES FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
5	7	PLATINUM MIRANDA LAMBERT
6	3	GREATEST HITS: DECADE #1 CARRIE UNDERWOOD
7	8	CRASH MY PARTY LUKE BRYAN
8	6	MAN AGAINST MACHINE GARTH BROOKS
9	5	THE OUTSIDERS ERIC CHURCH
10	—	HAPPY PRISONER: THE BLUEGRASS SESSIONS ROBERT EARL KEEN
11	12	THE COWBOY RIDES AWAY: LIVE FROM AT&T STADIUM • GEORGE STRAIT
12	10	GREATEST HITS SO FAR . . . ZAC BROWN BAND
13	9	BRINGING BACK THE SUNSHINE BLAKE SHELTON
14	13	JUST AS I AM BRANTLEY GILBERT
15	11	IGNITE THE NIGHT CHASE RICE
16	17	THE BIG REVIVAL KENNY CHESNEY
17	21	SUNDOWN HEAVEN TOWN TIM MCGRAW
18	16	I DON'T DANCE LEE BRICE
19	20	COLE SWINDELL COLE SWINDELL
20	15	PAIN KILLER LITTLE BIG TOWN
21	18	METAMODERN SOUNDS IN COUNTRY MUSIC STURGILL SIMPSON
22	14	RISER DIERKS BENTLEY
23	24	IT GOES LIKE THIS THOMAS RHETT
24	29	12 STORIES BRANDY CLARK
25	22	747 LADY ANTEBELLUM

SINGLES

Florida Georgia Line scores its sixth *Billboard* Country Airplay chart-topper, which has also been certified gold for sales of 500,000 downloads.



THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	TITLE/ARTIST
1	2	SUN DAZE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
2	3	MAKE ME WANNA THOMAS RHETT
3	1	I SEE YOU LUKE BRYAN
4	4	LONELY TONIGHT BLAKE SHELTON FEAT. ASHLEY MONROE
5	5	LIKE A COWBOY RANDY HOUSER
6	6	JUST GETTIN' STARTED JASON ALDEAN
7	8	MEAN TO ME BRETT ELDRIDGE
8	11	LONELY EYES CHRIS YOUNG
9	10	HOMEGROWN HONEY DARIUS RUCKER
10	9	TAKE IT ON BACK CHASE BRYANT
11	12	DRINKING CLASS LEE BRICE
12	13	AIN'T WORTH THE WHISKEY COLE SWINDELL
13	14	HOMEGROWN ZAC BROWN BAND
14	19	TAKE YOUR TIME SAM HUNT
15	17	SAY YOU DO DIERKS BENTLEY
16	16	WHAT WE AIN'T GOT JAKE OWEN
17	18	FREESTYLE LADY ANTEBELLUM
18	20	A GUY WALKS INTO A BAR TYLER FARR
19	21	SMOKE A THOUSAND HORSES
20	24	RAISE 'EM UP KEITH URBAN FEATURING ERIC CHURCH
21	22	TRAILER HITCH KRISTIAN BUSH
22	25	LITTLE RED WAGON MIRANDA LAMBERT
23	23	SHE DON'T LOVE YOU ERIC PAISLEY
24	26	DON'T IT BILLY CURRINGTON
25	27	BABY BE MY LOVE SONG EASTON CORBIN
26	36	WILD CHILD KENNY CHESNEY WITH GRACE POTTER
27	33	DIAMOND RINGS AND OLD BARSTOOLS TIM MCGRAW WITH CATHERINE DUNN
28	28	HARD TO BE COOL JOE NICHOLS
29	29	DRUNK AMERICANS TOBY KEITH
30	34	LOVE YOU LIKE THAT CANAAN SMITH



Six short weeks after entering the Top 10, Eric Church's video for "Talladega" races into the lead.

CMT VIDEOS

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	TITLE/ARTIST
1	2	TALLADEGA ERIC CHURCH
2	3	TIL IT'S GONE KENNY CHESNEY
3	4	SUN DAZE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
4	5	LONELY TONIGHT • BLAKE SHELTON FEAT. ASHLEY MONROE
5	8	MEAN TO ME BRETT ELDRIDGE
6	7	JUST GETTIN' STARTED JASON ALDEAN
7	6	LIKE A COWBOY RANDY HOUSER
8	10	MAKE ME WANNA THOMAS RHETT
9	9	HOMEGROWN HONEY DARIUS RUCKER
10	1	SOMETHING IN THE WATER CARRIE UNDERWOOD

SOURCE: CMT



The clip for The Band Perry's Grammy-winning rendition of a Glen Campbell classic flows gently up to No. 4.

GAC VIDEOS

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	TITLE/ARTIST
1	3	TALLADEGA ERIC CHURCH
2	2	SOMETHING IN THE WATER CARRIE UNDERWOOD
3	1	LONELY TONIGHT • BLAKE SHELTON FEAT. ASHLEY MONROE
4	8	GENTLE ON MY MIND THE BAND PERRY
5	6	LONELY EYES CHRIS YOUNG
6	7	LAY LOW JOSH TURNER
7	4	PERFECT STORM BRAD PAISLEY
8	13	SUN DAZE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
9	9	DON'T IT BILLY CURRINGTON
10	5	SHOTGUN RIDER TIM MCGRAW

SOURCE: GAC

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COUNTRY WEEKLY

Anxiously awaiting that new album from your favorite artist?
Eager to discuss the hot concert you just saw?
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AND VISIT
CountryWeekly.com



MATCH-UP

Several of our favorite country acts are kicking off brand-new summer tours beginning in May. See if you can match the six acts with the names of their tours.



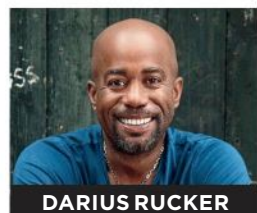
1

A



2

B



3

C



4

D



5

E



6

F



ANSWERS: 1-B; 2-D; 3-E; 4-F; 5-C; 6-A

COUNTRY WEEKLY

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The Nightmare Before Christmas - 00531
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Faithful Friends - Shih Tzu w/verse "You look at me with eyes of love" - 00286 One image.
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Rescued is My Breed of Choice - 00379
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Rescued is Something to Purr About - 00525
Leather Cover and Labels - 00525

Reflections - 00125
Leather Cover and Labels - 00125

5th Avenue - 00155
One image. Leather Cover and Labels - 00155

Parchment - 00612
Burgundy Leather Cover - 00030-004
Labels - 00032-008

Blue Safety - 00027
One image.
Leather Cover and Labels - 00155



Challis & Roos
Awesome Owls - 00337
Leather Cover and Labels - 00337



God Bless America - 00006
Leather Cover and Labels - 00006



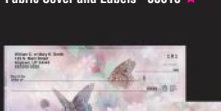
New Day w/verse
"Each day brings hope!" - 00447
Leather Cover and Labels - 00447



Painted Ponies - 00600
Leather Cover and Labels - 00600



Polka Dots - 00616
Fabric Cover and Labels - 00616



Lena Liu's Enchanted Wings - 00026
Leather Cover and Labels - 00026



Seasons of the Owl - 00739
Leather Cover and Labels - 00739



Fleur de Lis - 00589
Leather Cover and Labels - 00589



Parrot Bay - 00426
Leather Cover and Labels - 00426



Ohio State University - 00513
Leather Cover and Labels - 00513



St. Louis Cardinals - Major League Baseball - 00149
Leather Cover and Labels - 00149



Live, Laugh, Love, Learn w/verse "Life is not measured by the breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away" - 00332
Leather Cover and Labels - 00332



Grandkids Rule! w/verse "I'd rather be with my grandkids." - 00437
Leather Cover and Labels - 00437



Shining Stars - 00201
Leather Cover and Labels - 00201



Angel Kisses - 00019
Leather Cover and Labels - 00019



Thomas Kinkadee's Faith for All Seasons w/verse "Believe all things are possible with God" - 00105
Leather Cover and Labels - 00105



Comical Cats w/verse "Blossoming with Purr-sonality!" - 00570
Leather Cover and Labels - 00570



Lena Liu's Floral Borders - 00088 w/optional verse "Lord bless and keep you." - 00117
Leather Cover and Labels - 00088



Autism: Imagine - 00374
Leather Cover and Labels - 00374



Faith, Hope, Christ - 00633
Fabric Cover and Labels - 00633



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Footprints w/verse "One night I dreamed that I was walking along the beach with the Lord." - 00667
Fabric Cover and Labels - 00667



America's National Parks - 00055
Leather Cover - 00151 Labels - 00055



Lena Liu's Morning Serenade - 00029
Leather Cover and Labels - 00029



Lena Liu's Butterfly Gardens - 00311
Leather Cover and Labels - 00311



Cowboy Round Up - 00380
Leather Cover and Labels - 00380



Tropical Paradise - 00052
Leather Cover and Labels - 00052



Chevron Chic - 00678
Fabric Cover and Labels - 00678



Just Bee w/verse "Bee Kind" - 00386
Leather Cover and Labels - 00386



Spirit of the Wilderness - 00024
Leather Cover and Labels - 00024



Spirit of the Wilderness - 00024
Leather Cover and Labels - 00024

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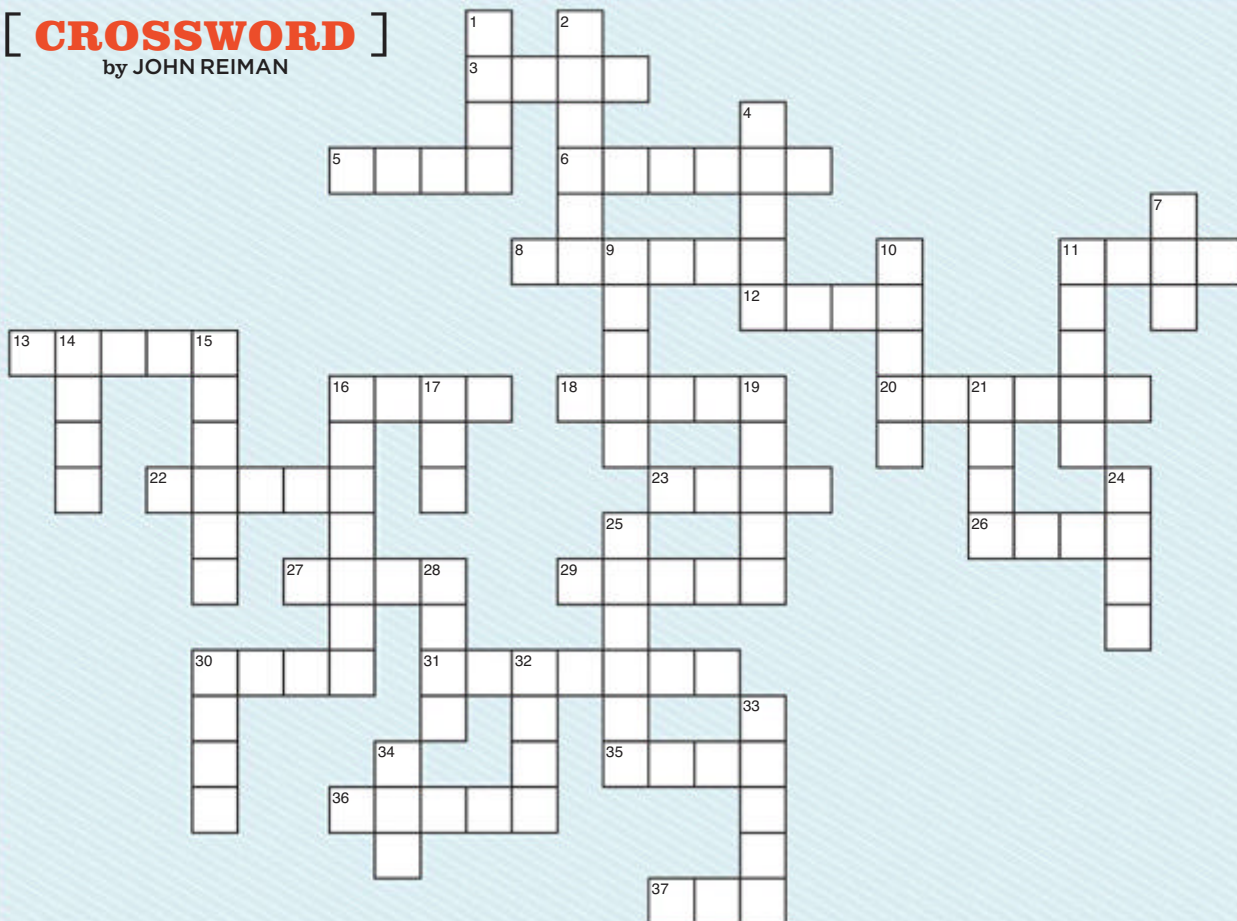
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[CROSSWORD]

by JOHN REIMAN



ACROSS

- 3 Randy Travis' "Is It Still ___?"
- 5 "Trailer Hitch" singer
- 6 University in England
- 8 Capital of Germany
- 11 Dierks Bentley's "Long ___ Alone"
- 12 Hank Williams' "I'm a Long ___ Daddy"
- 13 Minnesota's MLB team
- 16 Actor Jackman
- 18 Clint Black's "The ___"

You're Wearing"

- 20 "She Believes in Me" singer
- 22 Miranda Lambert's "Little Red ___"
- 23 "Best I Ever Had" singer
- 26 New artists Nikki or Olivia
- 27 The Mavericks' lead singer Malo
- 29 Eli Young Band's "Always the Love ___"
- 30 2015's Super Bowl halftime performer

31 *Metamodern Sounds in Country Music's* Sturgill ___

35 "Put My Heart Down" singer

36 Liam Neeson's movie ___ 3

37 Cape ___, New Jersey

DOWN

- 1 "Time Is Love" singer
- 2 Trisha Yearwood's "The Woman ___ Me"
- 4 Opposite of #9 Down
- 7 "All I Want

Is a Life" singer

9 Sawyer Brown's "Treat Her ___"

10 Actress Knightley

11 The ___ degree

14 Artists Hayes or Bowen

15 "You're Something Special to Me" singer

16 Budapest is here

17 ___ whiz

19 Out of ___

21 Jennifer Nettles' "That ___"

24 Montgomery

Gentry's "___ Yeah"

25 New artists A Thousand ___

28 Kenny Chesney's "I ___ It"

30 Zac Brown Band's "___ Deep"

32 Kelsea Ballerini's "Love Me Like You ___ It"

33 Martina McBride's "___ Girl"

34 Field ___

THOMAS KINKADE

Memories of Love

Heirloom Porcelain Cross

Lustrous Heirloom Porcelain cross features Thomas Kinkade's comforting Stairway to Paradise artwork

A sparkling Swarovski teardrop crystal dangles from the golden heart

Gleaming 22K gold accents adorn the cross

A Blessing of a Treasured Memory

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could build
a stairway
and memories
a lane,*

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JAMES

*I'd walk
right up
to Heaven
and bring you
Home again.*

Shown smaller
than actual size of
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People sing along at shows.

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would be . . .

Mother Teresa.

If I could change one thing about
myself it would be . . .

My temperament.

A guy can never have too many . . .

Loved ones.

I can't live without . . .

Music.

I wish I were . . .

Living in the Himalayas.

The one word that describes my
day today is . . .

Exciting.

The first thing I do in the
morning is . . .

Before I open my eyes, as a
ritual, just have gratitude for
the day and say this is going
to be the best day. Doesn't
always turn out like that, but
that's the intent.

Music is . . .

The breath of the universe.

I think that ____ sucks.

Death.

My favorite TV show is . . .

Futurama. →

I would love to do a duet with . . .

Vince Gill.





Darius Rucker



Hunter Hayes



Brantley Gilbert

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A large photograph of Luke Bryan performing on stage. He is wearing a blue t-shirt with "I'm So Fly" and a guitar graphic, a yellow and orange baseball cap, and sunglasses. He is holding a red cup in his right hand and a microphone in his left, with both arms raised. The background features stage lights and a large "H" logo.

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